



ILLUSTRATION: KATRIN STENMARK

The principle of dialogue that dominates Bakhtin's central essays on the novel has huge implications for literary theory. The weaving together of philosophical and literary concerns constitutes a certain kind of dialogism that challenges the frontiers of the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in language and that which is repressed and remains implicit is what makes Bakhtin's concept of dialogism so significant for understanding memory and the politics of forgetting.

Meena Alexander and the postcolonial memoir

In order to illustrate the idea of the postcolonial memoir as a discursive embodiment of a multilayered yet fractured consciousness, I shall read the two editions of the South Asian-American diasporic writer Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines: A Memoir*,⁵ first published in 1993 and then revised and republished in 2003 as dialogic texts. Meena Alexander is one of the most important contemporary Indian-American writers of the South Asian di-

aspora. Her poems, novels and memoirs have been widely read and anthologized. In addition to her acclaimed poetry, Meena Alexander's memoirs and novels have also received enormous critical interest. She has lived on four continents and her life is marked by multiple passages across continents and borders. With a literary career spanning three decades, Alexander's writing has generated sufficient scholarly interest.

Fault Lines: A Memoir represents the complexities associated with the diasporic experience. The text situates the female diasporic body as a location of endless marking. Alexander talks about the ways she has been continuously marked as a "South Asian woman", a "Third World woman", "a female of color", a "postcolonial writer", an "Asian-American feminist". All terms attempting to box her in finite, graspable categories; while ignoring the reality of multiple fractures, multiple migrations, that have fragmented her and made it impossible to name, comprehend, or contain her within any kind of boundaries. Alexander's works exhibit a transnational diasporic sensibility that refuses discursive categorization and instead negotiate a hybrid, fluid,

shifting, and hyphenated identity. All her works are profoundly influenced by the numerous ways in which she has experienced mobility, displacement and relocation and the multiple ways in which she has continuously negotiated complex intersections of cultures, languages, race, gender and history. Her perpetual search for home and her painful awareness of the impossibility of claiming any stable, single, fixed home; marks her writing with a diasporic angst that embodies the trauma of dislocation and fragmentation. Alexander's gendered and racialized subjectivity and her yearning for "physical, imaginative and spiritual space" ⁶ are articulated and represented in her works.

What is particularly interesting is the way the memoirs alter our understanding of the past when they are read together. Alexander left an extremely significant part of her past out of the 1993 publication. She adds a new chapter on sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather in the revised edition turning the figure of her beloved grandfather Ilya into someone who broke her trust and victimized her as a child. After September 11, 2001, Alexander felt compelled to write about her abuse and name her abuser and therefore needed to revise the memoir. As readers when we read the 1993 memoir after having come to know about the terrible secret that Alexander had not spoken about we realize that the text did contain, hidden in its silences and omissions, clues about the abuse that took place within the confines of the Tiruvella. The memoirs now read as a palimpsest. Each edition appears fundamentally different in the light of the other.

The texts offer a conflicting and incommensurate idea of the past and a fractured yet intensely interconnected vision of the present. Both the editions testify to the multilayered nature of consciousness through the workings of memory and language. Alexander uses both the texts to reveal her own struggle with what is allowed to be remembered and what one is compelled to forget. Alexander's memoirs engage, contest and alter each other to disrupt the possibility of singular meanings and absolute truth by rewriting and writing over a single text twice. In doing that she is able to break up the discourse of silence and unlock the dark, painful past that was carefully concealed. The memoirs testify to the presence of multiple voices that keep pushing against each other to resist the authority and autonomy of any single authorial voice. In this sense, the memoirs become dialogic, facilitating the articulation of a hybrid, diasporic sensibility that destabilizes narratives of singular origin and absolute identities.

Crisis of authorship, dialogism and writing memory

Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) clearly points out that Dostoevsky's work is "symptomatic of a profound crisis of authorship and of the utterance in general."⁷ Bakhtin's ideas of a fluid, questionable narrator who replaces the author as seen most prominently in Dostoevsky's novels is cause for celebration. Bakhtin sees this supplanting of the dominant authorial discourse by a free-flowing, relativized narrative which renders the former obsolete as, an indication of a new kind of writing. He goes so far as to assert that this new writing is a mark of progres-

sive democratic culture and irreducible pluralism. This is not to say that Bakhtin considers Dostoevsky's works simply as celebrations of social dialogue; rather what he sees in his writings is the ability of the author to find his or her "unique and unrepeatable place in relation to the characters ... without imposing a causal and deterministic logic on them."⁸ This allows the emergence of varied perspectives, a relativity of points of view and the presence of multiple voices in the text.

For Bakhtin the presence of multiple voices inside as well as outside the self generates conversation which is articulated through language. This multiplicity of contesting voices is dialogism. As an antidote to monologism, dialogism decenters authoritarian discourses to generate the idea of difference, of plurality, of talking back. Dialogism according to Mikhail Bakhtin would provide opportunities of renewal, regeneration, and offer multiplicity of meanings. Discourse in the Bakhtinian sense would hence incorporate messy communication such as cross-talking or writing over; thus hinting at the very Janus-like nature of utterance. According to Bakhtin there is no dialogism if there is no response. Every utterance becomes interpolated only through the articulation of a response. It is in this Janus-like utterance that context gets defined and new social realities get formed.

DIALOGISM BEGINS as a listening practice. Alexander's will to listen to her inner voice, to engage with it rigorously, crossing cultural and historical time to put it down as record, to archive it for the future are examples of how the impulse towards dialogism is present in postcolonial aesthetic practices. Alexander's 2003 *Fault Lines* talks back to the 1993 version and cuts through the authorial voice of the past to do the retelling. This latter version contradicts the earlier version and offers an alternate reality through intrusions, responses, objections, pauses and narratorial intervention. In the Bakhtinian sense, her writing of the 2003 memoir is evidently an example of "dialogized heteroglossia" that cross-talks in multiple tongues: literally in Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, Arabic, French, and English and metaphorically to the 1991 memoir in conflicting voices that hide as well as reveal, continue as well as disrupt and concede as well as interrogates. A close reading of both the works shows how Alexander is able to create a fountain-head of composites that threaten to open the floodgates of memory, dislodge boundaries of literature and narration, and signal the upheavals and "perils" of contact zone ⁹ which are social spaces where culture, language, race and class, meet, clash and grapple together in a violent tussle of power. Meena Alexander's memoir becomes the contact zone where past memories and present realities meet to open up a third space of negotiation and enunciation¹⁰, articulating how ethnic identities in a multicultural and multi-racial America clash with postcolonial identities of resistance and autonomy, and how hybrid diasporic contestations wrestle with transnational feminist collaboration. In this light 1991 the *Fault Lines: A Memoir* and the 2003 revised version can be read as competing centripetal and centrifugal texts that operate in simultaneity and in constantly shifting moments of utterance; cautioning us about the painful

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unreliability of history and memory, and the deeply ambiguous contours of language and discursive representation.

Writing a memoir offers Alexander a mode to unravel her past and a strategy to deal with the pain of multiple dislocations and the trauma of fractured identity. Responding to Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva in an interview, Alexander points out how “the whole issue of self-disclosure as it plays into postcolonial culture is a difficult one, but it may be more attractive to women because of the possibilities it offers of inventing a space for oneself.”¹¹ In the same interview she observes “I think this focus on the self is very peculiar to the culture of North America, and generally, so is the desire to create ‘autobiography.’ A constant attempt to vivify what one thinks of as identity by redefining one’s self is a very American project. The interest in postcoloniality [...] and about looking at one’s self is also part of the current wave of the culture.”¹² By writing a memoir Alexander is doing a very American thing and yet by choosing to write a memoir instead of an autobiography she is redefining what being American might mean for her. Concurrently, the memoirs give her the space to explore the pressures of being a postcolonial woman, living and writing in America. Most importantly, by choosing to write a memoir twice over, Alexander pushes against the boundaries of the text, prying open the dark memories of abuse sutured in silence and placed in the gap between forgetting and remembering.

Writing about the trauma of sexual abuse by her beloved Ilya, in the coda to the 1993 memoir, “The Book of Childhood” and talking about shame in “The Stone Eating Girl” changes the parameters of her relationship with the Tiruvella home and her own relationship with her body. Battling to come to terms with the realization that she had not only left a significant part of her childhood out of her writing but had also failed to remember, betrayed by her own memory – Alexander laments – “A woman who did not know herself, how could I have written a book on my life and thought it true?”¹³ It is only by writing the coda after the tragedy of 9/11 and by reading Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia*, a story told in fragments with the haunting image of a severed hand, that she is able to fill in the blank spaces of her memory. Alexander’s memory is filled with repressed or half-remembered stories from her past that are sometimes invented and at other times unpacked in order to ensure narrative flow and to make sense of her private tribulations and the psychological contradictions of living as a diasporic transnational in the U.S. In a way, the genre of memoir makes it possible for the discursive formation of identity in Alexander and writing it brings to the forefront contentious issues of postcolonial memory and belonging. Her writing points to the contradictory and arbitrary nature of private memory which in turn is reflective of the fragmented and fractured space of the postcolonial nation-state and the violent disjunctions of the metropole. In other words, *Fault Lines* preoccupation with remembrance and forgetting, trauma and exclusion, raises significant questions

about the nature of memory and representation.

In the chapter “Dark Mirror” Alexander confesses: “My aim is not to cross out what I first wrote but to deepen that writing, dig under it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created”.¹⁴ With her 2003 edition of *Fault Lines*, Alexander acknowledges the silences

that a text conspires to keep, in order to tell itself. For her, the *memory gap*¹⁵ closes on itself, facilitating a reclamation and recovery of memories that remained hidden in the blank spaces between writing and consciousness. I am using the term *memory gap* to indicate a slip in accessing a certain period of time in the life of the individual. Borrowing the term from the field of computer science which means “a gulf in access time, capacity and cost of computer storage technologies between fast, expensive, main-storage devices and slow, high capacity, inexpensive secondary-storage devices”,¹⁶ I want to show how certain amount of time in the life span of the individual is not available to *secondary memory* (embedded in the body and perhaps available only on recall through repetition or trauma) although there might be an uncomfortable remnant of it in the *primary memory* (part of the brain that holds information for reasoning and comprehension and is available in the form of active recall). But this lapse or fault in the ability to access that time is not permanent. Just like the movements of the earth’s surface cause fault lines that create a shift or transform boundaries, an extremely significant external event can dislodge the repressed memories, making them surface and claim ground, closing the memory gap by suddenly filling it up with the forgotten time.

Alexander’s writing occupies a space between layers of loss and mined in gaps: of memory, of home, of language, of family, of location, of identity. It is marked by the urgency of breaking free and leaving. Loss becomes an important feature of migrant subjectivity and leads to a serious deficiency or lack in Alexander’s attempts at self-construction and self-definition. In an interview with Susie Tharu she says, “I write because I don’t know what I am.”¹⁷ Attempting to reconstruct her subjectivity through a recovery of her childhood and a mapping of her several dislocations, Alexander enters her own narrative as a fractured and “self-declared deficient subject who has been traumatized, by her multiple migrations, sexual abuse and forgetfulness;”¹⁸ and needs to make up memory in order to reconstruct her fractured subjectivity and reclaim her past.

Body memory: Home, belonging and postcolonial dislocations

In the 1993 memoir Alexander begins with the question: “Where did I come from? How did I become what I am?”¹⁹ Doing a genealogical search for her origins, and realizing the ambiguity of beginnings, Alexander is tormented by issues of belonging and roots. By the time she rewrites the memoir in 2003, she is a woman broken by multiple migrations who now needs to write

to remember, to connect nothing with nothing. Going back to the mother and her mother's mother and to all the mothers who came before them, Alexander searches for the maternal home that holds the promise of safely enconcing her and making her whole. Unfortunately, her search for the original, primary, maternal home draws her only to the "darkness of the Tiruvella house with its cool bedrooms and coiled verandas: the shelter of memory."²⁰ The darkness of the Tiruvella house holds a terrible secret, which if disclosed will crack open the neat layers of silence that protect the family from splintering. The coiled verandas, a meandering maze complicate the search for truth and access to the past. Although she is aware of the powers of recall, she is also certain that.

the house of memory is fragile; made up in the mind's space. Even what I remember best, I am forced to admit, is what has flashed up for me in the face of present danger, at the tail end of the century, where everything is to be elaborated, spelt out, precariously reconstructed. And there is little sanctity in remembrance.²¹

By linking the present danger at the tail end of the century with the dangers of sexual violation, Alexander attests to the ways in which personal histories are always related to larger global histories. The terror attacks of 9/11, national trauma and the subsequent increase in racial and ethnic profiling in the United States and in a lot of countries in the global North, incidents of violence in America trigger the recovery of a personal trauma. The private self gets inextricably linked with the public history of the nation, intersecting the personal with the political and "initiating a complex interrelational process of evaluating the self with respect to the greater history."²² Alexander becomes a commentator of the times whose embedded and relational self is hinged upon the unstable hyphenations with people, community, places and events.

Recognizing how memory touches upon the questions of dislocation, identity, nationalism, and power, Alexander forces herself to ask in the section "Writing in Fragments", "How could I not have known what happened to me?" She then answers:

The short answer is of course I knew. I simply could not bear to remember. I picked through any books I could find on trauma theory. I taught myself to accept that there is knowledge that is too much for the nervous system to bear, that disappears underground, but sparks up through fault lines. [...]

As I remembered Ilya, as I wrote him into being, I saw the child that I was, the child who set herself the harsh task of forgetting. To learn to forget is as hard as to learn to remember.

The girl child and the woman flow together. Will the hand that was cut off become part of my body again? How slowly I pick up the *qalam*.²³

Writing her way into the home of her past, pushed by the image of the severed hand in Djebbar's *Fantasia*, she jolts the reader into a shock. The reader is shocked not because she remembered but because she forgot. The other reason why it is doubly difficult to deal with the omission of the abuse is her representation of her grandfather in the 1993 memoir:

Almost seventy by the time I was born, he [Ilya] was well established as an intellectual and community leader [...] I began to accept his place in the world around him, his public power. I loved him more than I have ever loved anyone in my life – in that intensity that childhood brings.²⁴

In the early chapters of the 2003 version, Ilya remains the central figure in her imagination and in her discourse. He is the one who teaches her about her family roots and her culture and provides her with a sense of belonging to a nation and to its history. She goes on to say, "I could not conceive life without Ilya. I drew nourishment from him as a young thing might from an older being gnarled with time",²⁵ and even as a grown up woman many years after his death, Alexander's connection to the Tiruvella house is embedded in her being through the fluid and intimate longing she feels for Ilya. As the writing starts flowing out of her body, she marks the fault lines of memory, an ambivalent way of remembering things. The loving, nurturing, enabling figure of Ilya begins to break up into something else, hinting at trouble under the surface.

AT THE BEGINNING of "Katha", Alexander talks about "two sorts of memories; two opposing ways of being towards the past. The first makes whorls of skin and flesh [...]. A life embedded in a life, and that in another life, another and another. [...] The other kind of memory comes to her in "bits and pieces of the present, it renders the past suspect, cowardly, baseless".²⁶ The first type of memory is the external "legitimate memory" and the second kind is the "deep memory." Hyphenated and contradicted by the location of the body from which one speaks and the self that one speaks of, Alexander's subjectivity is represented through conflict and contradiction. In 1933, her memoir used the whorls of skin and flesh of memory to paint Ilya, tracing him in her blood and in the bloodstream of the Tiruvella clan. In 2003, the bits and pieces of scrap that were enfolded in forgetfulness begin to emerge, filled by the "burning present, cut by existential choices," placing her previously told childhood history on a fault line, and turning her postcolonial identity into an arbitrary and contingent thing.²⁷

Rewriting the memoir points to the transmutation that takes place in the case of memories and to how memories become gnarled and garbled with time. In her own words, it was impossible to feel at home with all those memories as they sat layered in the recesses of her mind, making her breathless and restive. This feeling of discomfort, of not being able to inhabit her own body and the pain of homelessness is not because Alexander did not have a home but because she had too many "to count,

to describe.”²⁸ Just like there were rooms after rooms that made a maze out of the Tiruvella house of her childhood, Alexander’s memory too causes her tremendous unease. This sense of alienation and homelessness can be negotiated only if she writes her abuse into language, confronting rather than concealing. “*Write in fragments, the fragments will save you*”²⁹ she notes after reading Djébar’s book. Fragments become an important discursive tool through which Alexander attempts to make sense of herself and her multiple dislocations. Her memoir thus does not follow any chronological order, nor does it remain bound in one language, or maintain cartographic divisions. It moves from her childhood memories to present circumstances, to lyrical explorations of history, geography even etymology of the words she is using or source-images she is encountering. Stories about her childhood get morphed into a her awakening of class consciousness in Khartoum, Sudan, and then get transported into a story told in India about being too shy to talk to Westerners, sentences get juxtaposed with each other to give the impression of continuity but concealing the crack of the faulty grammar. Her sentences come out gnarled and wrapped in time and in stone that carries the dead weight of shame, always threatening her with consequences that might be violent and fatal. The stone, as referred to in “The Stone-Eating Girl”, is a mark of extreme violence that has been committed on the female body. It is also the symbol of a sinister secret that haunts Alexander even while she is in Manhattan, and most importantly it stands for shame, for guilt of having trespassed, for being *perachathe* – shameless. In 1993 when she wrote the memoir her mouth was filled with these stones, swelling her belly, hurting her, knotting her up as each sentence that she tries to utter is a coiled-up stone, couching her writing in gaps and silence.

This silence prompts her to question her own writing and her role as a memoirist:

What foundations did my house stand on? What sort of architect was I if the lowest beams were shredded? If the stones were mouldering, fit to fall apart. What was the worth of words? [...] I was tormented by the feeling that I had written a memoir that was not true.³⁰

By remembering her abuse and the consequent shame, Alexander invokes the powers of the stone-eating girl to overcome the silence that her body was trapped in. With the slow awakening of her hidden past, haunted by the image of the severed “hand of mutilation and of memory”,³¹ Alexander acknowledges the violence that fractured her body and splintered her self. She writes: “I learnt again that the body remembers when consciousness is numbed, that there is an instinctual truth of the body all the laws of the world combined cannot legislate away.”³² Grandfather Ilya and the memory of abuse are registered not in her consciousness but fused

into her mind as one indivisible flesh. This kind of remembrance which is embodied points to a conflicting, oppositional consciousness. The socially constructed external memory of Ilya marks him as the nurturing, loving grandfather while the deep memory hides him and the heinous act that he perpetrated by this act of fusion. Deep memory according to Charlotte Delbo is “the persistence of the past in its own perpetual present,”³³ memory that runs through Alexander’s memoirs and her body like an undercurrent whose force is palpable yet cannot be seen. The external memory and the deep memory gets superimposed holding Alexander’s body and her writing to ransom, pushing her through the layers of loss and pulling her to the spaces of desire.

IN ALEXANDER’S CASE, memory is activated through the stimuli of an equally traumatic public event. Confronting the memories of sexual abuse for the first time, not after her father’s or her grandfather’s death, but in 2001 in the national and collective trauma of 9/11 and its aftermath, Alexander’s individual narrative of trauma splits open the “dark mirror” and [tears] open the skin of memory,³⁴ making her write the memoir once again. Rewriting the book of remembrance and scratching the wounds open she begins to approach her past with the sense of discovery. Invoking Walter Benjamin whom she quotes in the preface to the section divider for “The Book of Childhood” she justifies her attempts to re-open her memoir in order to complete it: “He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging ... He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter...”³⁵ Like the man who digs, turns over soil and scatters it, Alexander writes her self into the soil of her past in order to disclose, disgorge, and disperse the trauma of childhood abuse.

Troubled by her gradual awareness that she has left out something very important in her memoir, Alexander realizes that she needs to write once again. Later in the memoir Alexander tellingly describes the way the Tiruvella ancestral home with its teak and brass fixtures, is torn down to construct a new residence with modern conveniences. The metaphor of tearing down the old in order to make way for the new is symbolic of the rebuilding and restoring that she does by writing into memory the interiors of the house that remained hidden behind the fixtures, the gloss and the order. This rebuilding of the house by unearthing the traces of the “interior” is what Walter Benjamin alludes to as “the asylum of art”, “where to dwell means to leave traces. In the

interior these are accentuated”.³⁶ According to Alexander, re-writing the memoir by accentuating the traces of what had happened and what got left out is to acknowledge that “zone of radical illiteracy.” It is in this zone that trauma and shame come together in a fiery muteness wherein the possibility of translation is directly linked to the author’s ability to transport the violent unevenness and the

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sharp jaggedness of the self and its past. Alexander talks about this zone as a place where we go to when words fail us, “where a terrible counter-memory wells up” and which can be found only when one falls through the door into the dark gap.³⁷

Falling through the memory gap, picking up the memoir to put together the missing pieces, particularly after 9/11, after the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and on reading Djébar’s *Fantasia*, Alexander confesses, “My aim is not to cross out what I wrote, but to deepen that writing, dig under it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created.”³⁸ As she confronts the truth in the discursive space of the memoir, she wonders what really fractured her and what defines her subjectivity. Is it the material facts of her many border crossings and her multiple dislocations or is it the betrayal and violation she experienced at the hands of the one she had most loved and most trusted, her beloved maternal grandfather? For Alexander there is no easy answer. Just as her transoceanic journeys took her from nation to nation, from culture to culture, from languages to languages; her journey from the dark chambers of secret shame to the white pages of imagination lit up by the sharp sunlight of disclosure takes her from trauma to healing. Her experiences of migrant dislocation and the trauma of private violation are intricately linked with each other to create a self that is dangerously split and deeply fractured, turning her into a subject who lives on the fault lines of a dark indigo body.

ALTHOUGH ALEXANDER’S writing is able to effectively recover the past, turning her into a subject who is able to live with the fractures, the way she operates between the two kinds of memory opens up her “subjectivity to profound historical disruption.”³⁹ Her disclosure of forgetting crucial experiences from the past and her ability to recall them after a decade, points to the faulty nature of representation and the ambiguity of what is understood as truth. For a subject who is “cracked by multiple migrations”⁴⁰ and confesses to being a “faultmass,”⁴¹ the intrusion of repressed memories into the space of desired memories shakes up the very foundations of her subjectivity and destroys the very nature of her belonging. On one hand, the memories of Ilya’s “tall figure standing in the sunlight”⁴² with tears on his face, are powerfully wrought in the 1993 memoir, but in the 2003 edition this image of Ilya is broken into pieces, as Alexander writes her abuse in order to retrace spaces of unimaginable loss and unspeakable violence. The memory of Ilya seeing them off at the railway station signifies her deep, spiritual bond with him, and the moment of separation is symbolic of radical loss. This image of separation haunts her throughout her life and in the 1993 memoir she explains it thus: “That moment of parting from Ilya, repeated time and again as we returned to Tiruvella, only to leave again, became my trope of loss.”⁴³ Without reading the 2003 memoir it is impossible to figure out how the trope of loss could be anything but a symbol of dislocation, homelessness and migration. In fact the 1993 memoir conceals the possibil-

ity of alternate readings by first recounting how looking back at that moment of leaving she felt at that very instant that her “life split, then doubled itself, in a terrible concupiscence.”⁴⁴ The 1993 memoir hides its secret carefully wherein the reader may have a sense of discomfort but is not able to grasp why. This faint unease gets explained only in the revised edition when she talks of her abuse and imagines telling her father who would understand also hoping that the reader would understand: “Appa, Ilya hurt me sexually when I was a child. I could not bear to remember.”⁴⁵

Thus, that moment of separation on the railway platform, when Ilya sees them off on to their journey to Sudan is crucial to Alexander’s migrant subjectivity. It is here that for the first time she feels disjointed, fractured and displaced. Throughout her life this sense of separation and dislocation gets reinforced by simultaneous returning and leaving, threatening her sense of location and defying the unified consciousness of time and memory. The cycle of discontinuity that we see in Alexander’s migrancy is a reminder that dislocation and split subjectivity may occur not only through physical deterritorialization, but can also result from psychic and emotional rupture.

Conclusion

Meena Alexander’s *Fault Lines* is an attempt to rebuild a fractured life in the discursive space of literature by giving voice to deep memory. *Fault Lines* is a text that finds its place at the site of many transits: it is a story told by a writer who wants to make sense of her past; it is an account of a postcolonial migrant writer’s decentered subjectivity; it is a text that points to the unreliability of memory and language; it is a memoir that explodes a fiercely guarded secret and reveals the violence that lurks in homes and inside people; but above all it is a narrative that supports the weight of a life yet tethers on the fault lines of personal history.

Using deep memory to draw up the unremembered past, Alexander does not give into the pitfalls of lame nostalgia but instead, creatively constructs a future that offers her the possibility of a negotiation with her fractured subjectivity and provides her the space to participate in her own healing. *Fault Lines* use of memory as work, in the Bakhtinian sense, can be read as a restorative and recuperative text. By writing back to the 1993 version in 2003, Alexander is able to make sense of the past, reclaim the stories that remained untold and caution us to the deeply ambiguous and inconclusive nature of all representation. In Bakhtinian terms, *Fault Lines* (1993 and 2003) points to “intentional hybridization,”⁴⁶ bringing the two versions in contact with each other without offering the possibility of any final resolution. The readers are free to choose the versions they find

convincing and are open to shifting loyalties. Playing with continuity, Alexander keeps writing the same story twice over; but also disrupts it by inserting her memory of the sexual abuse and challenging the very foundations of the earlier memoir. Thus, *Fault Lines* is both continuous as well as discontinu-

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ous. By opposing one value system over the other, Alexander destabilizes the authorial subject in the first edition while making the post-authorial narrator of the 2003 version an unreliable one.

Interestingly, what *Fault Lines* (1993 and 2003) does is to question the very nature of writing, memory and language. It shows how the remembering subject and the writing subject in spite of being one, is still a dialectical synthesis of antithetical forces, entangled with and shot through within the possibility and the inevitability of another memory, another voice, another language and another point of view. ✕

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- 7 Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 91.
- 8 Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 95.
- 9 The idea of peril and danger of contact zones is taken from Mary Louis Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). She argues that “autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression”, along with “miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning,” serve as both “arts” and the perils of contact zones.
- 10 Homi Bhabha’s theory of postcolonial diasporic hybridity and the third space of enunciation and negotiation in his book *The Location of Culture* refers to a liminal space critical of essential identities and original culture. It is a space that is fraught with the complexities of translation of language and disruption of narratives. According to Bhabha the third space is a space of possibility where new forms of cultural practices, meaning and identities emerge by virtue of contestations and clashes with old and limited forms of existing categories of being and belonging, (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 11 Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, eds., *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 47.
- 12 Bahri, 36.
- 13 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 214.
- 14 Ibid., 229.
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- 16 McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific & Technical Terms, 6 E. S.v. “memory gap.” Retrieved May 11 2017 from <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/memory+gap>
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- 18 Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, *The Postcolonial Citizen: The Intellectual Migrant* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 29.
- 19 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 2.
- 20 Ibid., 3.
- 21 Ibid., 3.
- 22 Aparajita De, “Making Meanings, Suturing Contradictions: An Analysis of Fault Lines” in *Mapping Subjectivities: The Cultural Poetics of Mobility and Identity in South Asian Diasporic Literature*, (PhD diss., University of West Virginia, 2009), 136.
- 23 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 242.
- 24 Ibid., 52.
- 25 Ibid., 36.
- 26 Ibid., 29–30.
- 27 Ibid., 34.
- 28 Ibid., 51.
- 29 Ibid., 237.
- 30 Ibid., 241.
- 31 Ibid., 236.
- 32 Ibid., 242.
- 33 Roberta Culberston in “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self” cites Charlotte Delbo who gives an example of “deep memory”: “I feel it again, through my whole body, which becomes a block of pain, and I feel death seizing me, I feel myself die [...] the cry awakens me, and I emerge from the nightmare, exhausted. It takes days for everything to return to normal [...] I become myself again, the one you know, who can speak to you of Auschwitz without showing any signs of distress or emotion.” *New Literary History*, 26: no. 1 (1995): 170.
- 34 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 229.
- 35 Ibid., 227.
- 36 Ibid., 260.
- 37 Ibid., 260.
- 38 Ibid., 229.
- 39 Dutt-Ballerstadt, *The Postcolonial Citizen*, 44.
- 40 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 2.
- 41 Ibid., 3.
- 42 Ibid., 63.
- 43 Ibid., 63.
- 44 Ibid., 63.
- 45 Ibid., 241.
- 46 In Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* discourse is double-voiced, where one voice deliberately exposes and ironizes the other. Intentional hybridization of discourse is inherently dialogic as two points of view are set against each other, separate and unmixed. (University of Texas Press, 1981), 360.



From the 15th Bakhtin Conference: Julia Hayes inflated balloons show the Bakhtin's theories of meaning in praxis.

Workshop. **Further discussion on the expansion of Bakhtinian ideas**

SAVE THE DATE:

October 4, 2017, Room MA796 at Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

TO PARTICIPATE:

Send an e-mail to Yulia Gradskova, yulia.gradskova@sh.se

OCTOBER 4, 2017 there will be a workshop, "Bakhtinian Theory. Postcolonial and Postsocialist Perspective", organized by the Institute of Contemporary History at the School of Historical and Contemporary Studies and the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

The workshop is a follow up to the publication of this special section in *Baltic Worlds*. Which in turn is a follow up of the 15th International Bakhtin Conference "Bakhtin as Praxis: Academic Production, Artistic Practice, Political Activism" (July 2014, Stockholm).

The workshop participants will be asked to continue the discussion that was started in this special section. Questions include (among others): How can Bakhtinian ideas expand and enrich our understanding and analyses of contemporary political movements and social transformations? And How might Bakhtinian ideas be developed or revised better to suit analyses of non-Western cultures?

The programme for this full day workshop will be announced at Baltic Worlds' web site.