Re-imagining Family: Growing Family Therapy Practice from the Rhizome of Autoethnography

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Abstract This chapter explores a therapist's autoethnography and the subsequent shaping effects of his self-in-relation, for him and his therapy practice. The autoethnography employed narrative therapy's re-membering practices to (re)write into existence an enriched relationship with the therapist's deceased mother. This process produced movements through which he and his family were transformed. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, *becoming different* became possible in surprising and delightful ways that he did not foresee when he began his autoethnography. The final section of the chapter turns to how these new *becomings* played out rhizomatically in the therapist's family therapy.

Introduction

Family therapy has long concerned itself with the significance of the therapist's self-in-relation. Extending this tradition, narrative therapy pays attention to the narratives of therapists' own lives (White 1997), that is the ways in which we as therapists draw on our own storied life experiences in our therapy practices. Furthermore, White's (2007) exposition of a two-way account of therapy suggests that every therapeutic encounter also shapes the therapist's life. This chapter extends these emphases of narrative therapy by drawing on an aspect of the autoethnographic research of one therapist, Andrew, and its reappearance in his family therapy practice in a way that we describe as rhizomatic. Andrew, Elmarie, and Kathie write this chapter together out of the different learning opportunities of

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this autoethnography for each of us: Andrew as researcher and family therapist, Elmarie as teacher and research supervisor, and Kathie as teacher and therapy supervisor.

Narrative therapy emerged from the linguistic and discursive turns in philosophy (White and Epston 1990) exemplified by the work of poststructuralist philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida. Narrative therapy's central explanatory metaphor was and continues to be the story, but always a story situated in the socio-cultural–political realm. In emphasising that identity is a social achievement, White (1997) developed a range of practices that recruit audiences to the stories people tell about their lives (outsider witnessing, see White 2007), or that select others into association with a person's life (re-membering practices, see White 2007). This chapter builds from these familiar metaphors and practices of narrative therapy, by entering some new territories that narrative therapy has begun to explore. In regard to such ongoing explorations, Winslade (2009) described Michael White as "always searching for new ways to describe this work [therapy], combing the writings of creative thinkers for inspiration" (p. 345). This chapter makes a small contribution to that quest, in a number of steps.

We first suggest that developments in autoethnographic research provide the therapy field with concepts and methods to investigate the territory of the therapist's self-in-relation. Such explorations provide a possibility for what Dickerson (2014, p. 412) advocates for twenty-first-century family therapy—"a more complex understanding of context, of multiplicity and of social justice". We introduce autoethnography as a research genre where, in the process of writing, self and culture are brought into dialogue, asserting multiplicity. We then show how Andrew employed narrative therapy's remembering practices in an autoethnographic exploration of his relationship with his deceased mother, Ranji. At the same time, we take a turn to the explanatory metaphor of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). This is a step that fits with the traditions of narrative therapy as it continues to value curiosity in the to and fro of therapy and in theorising practice (White 1991). The turn is also a rhizomatic growth from the work of both White and Winslade (see Winslade 2009) who more recently applied the work of Deleuze in analysing therapeutic conversation.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that traditional thought tends to follow the familiar linear and hierarchical pattern of a tree—it has roots, a trunk, and branches. By contrast, a rhizome, a rootstock which often grows in unexpected directions, "has no middle: no trunk. It has no end: no leaves. It is always in the middle, always in process" (May 2005, p. 133). A rhizome connects and opens space in-between, it subverts hierarchy, and it cannot be reduced to a single point or radical core (Conley 2006). The metaphor of a rhizome, we suggest, offers an opportunity to extend thinking about therapy, and about the therapist's self-in-relation, beyond ideas about linearity, cause and effect. The rhizome appears at various points in this chapter, offering us possibilities to show self-as-process, a self-in-relation in the midst of movement: in Deleuze and Guattari's terms also a "becoming", as we show shortly.

Autoethnographic Writing

Autoethnography is an "autobiographical genre of writing and research" (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 739). It brings together ethnography and autobiography in ways that have evolved in a number of directions. Our particular interest is the directions offered by poststructuralist autoethnography (Gannon 2003, 2006; Moneypenny 2013; Moneypenny and Kotzé 2014). Poststructuralist autoethnography provides opportunities to experiment with different ways of writing the self, while recognising that personal narratives can always only be partial and incomplete (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). As the autoethnographic excerpts that follow illustrate, "the authority for the story begins with the body and memories of the autoethnographic writer at the scene of lived experience" (Gannon 2006, p. 475), and these are of necessity limited.

Foucault's general suggestion about writing might well be applied to the orientation taken in writing autoethnography: "I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before" (2000, p. 240). Such writing has an ethical purpose, as Gannon explains:

> The purpose of writing is "nothing less than the shaping of the self" [Foucault 1997a, p. 211] through reflexive and imaginative attention to everyday lived experience and ethical principles for living. Writing the self produces transformation of the self and, potentially, of the world in local and particular contexts. (2006, p. 479)

This argument is in line with Michael White's (2000) caveat that in narrative therapy, a therapist does not know in advance of the therapy how a client's life should be lived. At the start of a research study, an autoethnographer does not know what new thoughts might become possible, what possibilities for just practice or for ethical subjectivity might emerge. Autoethnographic writing thus tends to emerge in a rhizomatic fashion—taking directions that cannot be predicted or known in advance. The research occurs in the process of writing, in bringing into dialogue self and culture.

As we turn now to Andrew's autoethnographic study (Kulasingham 2013), we pause again at the rhizome. We do not claim a linear relationship between autoethnography and therapy practice. Instead, we suggest that writing the self in dialogue with theory, ethics and culture provided a meaningful shaping of Andrew's therapeutic practice, his becoming. *Becoming* is the second Deleuzo-Guattarian concept that we employ in this chapter. It continues the metaphor of a rhizome's nonlinear growth and disrupts familiar understandings of linearity:

> A line of becoming is not defined by points it connects … on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle … a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination … A line of becoming has only a middle … (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 293)

In writing here of Andrew's *becoming,* our focus is on a dialogue that is "always in process" between the self, ethics, professional practice and culture.

Andrew describes himself as a Malaysian-born Sri Lankan Tamil who immigrated with his immediate family to Aotearoa, New Zealand. As part of his Master of Counseling study at the University of Waikato, he used autoethnography to explore his relationship with three generations of women in his family: his mother, his wife and his daughter. Andrew hoped to reshape his contributions to relational practices, in this way becoming different from what he was before the conversations that took place as part of his research explorations. In order to include in these conversations his mother who had passed away—the focus of this chapter—Andrew invited his siblings to assist in researching moments of his mother's life story. The research conversations for his autoethnography produced many challenging and poignant moments. Listening to the narratives of the significant women in his life, researching theory and philosophies, Andrew revisited, reshaped and rewrote relational practices that produced movements and *becomings* in personal and professional relationships in expected and unexpected ways.

Re-membering Practices in an Autoethnographic Study

Andrew's autoethnographic study drew on narrative therapy's remembering practices (White 1988, 2007; Hedtke 2003; Hedtke and Winslade 2004, 2005), reshaping these practices as a research method. Re-membering conversations are "reengagements with the history of one's relationships", with the purpose of revising the "memberships" one has with significant others in one's life (White 2007, p. 129). Andrew drew on re-membering practices in investigating his relationship with his deceased mother, Ranji. Through this work, he reclaimed his mother's membership of what narrative therapy calls his "club of life" (White 1988, 2007; Hedtke and Winslade 2004), in other words, those persons whose presence enhances well-being and supports what we ourselves care about and hope for in our lives.

> Andrew remembers:
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> I had never spoken about the seven years of being separated from my mother, as I lacked the vocabulary to articulate the story. I never asked my mother the nagging question: why? Even after I returned to live with the family, we never discussed this. How could I discuss it? How could I ask her these questions that had been on my mind since being away? 'Mom, why did you send me away? How did you find it in your heart to do that? Could you not see it in my eyes? Didn't you hear me? Those teary eyes, those tight hugs when you said goodbye. They were saying only one thing. Don't leave me again. Take me home. Mom, why did you send me away?' How could I possibly ask these questions? I loved her and I knew she loved me. To talk about these things would bring up old hurts and risk altering this loving relationship built through the years.

The separation from his mother and siblings, following the sudden death of his father, had brought pain, confusion and a longing to belong, unspoken until Andrew began speaking the story in the Master of Counseling program. In conversations with family and friends, he asked why he was sent away for seven years to live with

extended family in a town far away from his mother. Andrew revisited his relationship with his mother, Ranji, and told and retold the story of being separated from his mother as a child in research conversations with Elmarie and in conversation with other family members.

In one re-membering conversation, Andrew and his sister discussed the visits that their mother Ranji made to Andrew during his years away from her. Andrew learned that his mother knew how expectantly he awaited her visit. His sister said: "Mom knew you would be the first person to greet her at the door. You would hold her hand and never let it go". Ranji knew he was waiting for her, and she never disappointed him. Every visit kept the smouldering hope of reunion alive. Weingarten (2000, p. 8) speaks of hope as a verb, an active continuous practice, bringing "people together to work toward a preferred future". As his mother continued to work towards bringing him home, the visits ensured not just a continued relationship, but a "doing hope" (Weingarten 2010) of being together again one day.

The term "re-membering" was first used by Barbara Myerhoff, an anthropologist, who worked with elderly Jewish communities in California. The practice of re-membering refers to the reintroduction of members of one's life story and the performance of one's story to an audience who witness to one's identity claims. White (1997) reshaped the practice of "re-membering" in introducing it to narrative therapy, and developing the "club of life" metaphor (1988, 1997, 2007). First, rather than encouraging those who are grieving the loss of a loved one to gradually work towards accepting the loss by "saying goodbye", White (1988) proposed practices of "saying hullo again". "Saying hullo again" is an invitation to people who are grieving to maintain an ongoing relationship with the person who has passed on, by renewing the deceased's "membership of the club of life" (White 2007, p. 138). Second, White suggested that therapeutic re-membering conversations "encourage the development of notions of identity that emphasize the contributions that others make to our lives and to our understandings of self" (2007, p. 138).

We now turn to Andrew's autoethnography. The development of his study took a rhizomatic path, even though in this chapter, we resort to a linear telling of the story. Andrew came to understand the actions, dilemmas and decisions of his mother Ranji by tracing some of her journey as a Malaysian-born Sri Lankan Tamil woman. Ranji's life took many turns and we start with Andrew's writing of the silence and separation that shaped their relationship, even after she passed on.

Writing Separation and Silence

Ranji left her dreams at the Sikamat cemetery. Widowed at 37, with four young children, her life became unbearably challenging. The two older boys were sent away as the extended family made decisions to help her to get back on her feet. Junior, the eldest, returned after one year, while Andrew, her third child, remained separated from her for seven years. However, she visited him every month. For seven years, every month, she boarded a bus from Seremban to Kajang on a

Saturday morning. In Kajang, she took another bus to the capital city, Kuala Lumpur, where Andrew lived. The four-hour trip to see her son did not seem too long to her. Always filled with anticipation, her life revolved around these monthly visits: month after month, year after year, one birthday after another, for seven years.

These seven years were difficult years for Andrew. His life revolved around the cycle of his mother's visits. He counted the days until the next visit. He stood at the door waiting for her, waiting to hug her. He was happiest on those weekends when she came to visit. She was kind and had a soothing voice. She always spoke gently to him. He could see in her eyes a mother's love. She loved him. It always seemed that the weekend would come to an end as soon as it began. She would leave him again. Why? He did not know. He cried a lot. Not in front of anyone. He could not. His aunt and uncle were kind enough to look after him. He was not their child. He could not cry in front of them. That would be ungrateful. His tears spoke a language he understood. Tears would say things he could not say. Each time his mother left, he wanted to say, "Please don't leave me again. Take me back with you". He could not say it, so he used the only language he knew—tears. Why would she not take him back? Why only him? His siblings were with her. Why was he sent away? Was something wrong with him? The questions were left unspoken and unanswered. Another monthly visit would come to an end. "Maybe next month", he would say to himself. "Maybe next month, she will take me home". Andrew and Ranji both carried the pain of the separation in silence… no questions, no explanations. However, Ranji visited Andrew … once a month for seven years. Ranji resisted the curious, evaluative gazes of bystanders, the spoken and unspoken pressures of cultural norms of marriage for the sake of "normality" or "sameness" and kept working, sometimes more than one job, to visit him once a month. She faced hardship, hard labour, poverty, overcrowded buses and tiring journeys to stay present in her son's life.

Resembling a Family

The day finally came. In 1977, Ranji made arrangements to bring her son back home. It was not an ideal situation. Her landlord raised the rent beyond what she could afford. Ranji and her children moved into the spare room of the home of another relative who lived in the same town. Ranji brought Andrew back to live there with the family. For six months, they lived in a cramped room, five of them. Those were the worst times for Ranji and her children. The children experienced violence from male relatives, who took it upon themselves to discipline the children. Andrew's brother, Junior, bore the brunt of it. Ranji could not prevent it: she was silenced. She had no say. She was silenced by men, who were granted cultural and gendered rights over women's and children's lives.

From the in-between time of silence and separation, the rhizomatic growth of resembling a family became possible in 1977 as Andrew reunited with his family.

However, another silence, imposed by violence and intimidation, was brought about from within the extended family. This period was followed by another *becoming,* as Ranji emerged, from beneath patriarchal violence and displacement, as a homeowner.

A Tiny Terraced House

The year 1978 would inscribe itself as a time of change in Ranji's life. With the support of a group of four women friends, she took a loan and purchased a small house. This was no easy feat. At 43, with no knowledge of property ownership, she embarked on a path she had never walked. She engaged a lawyer, filled out loan applications and went hunting for a suitable house, fuelled by the single passion to provide her children with a safe home.

Finally, she moved into her new home in Seremban—a tiny terraced house, linked to a row of houses that shared their side walls. Ranji now had new dreams. Her children's future was her dream. She was building a life for them, a life beyond a cycle of violence and poverty. The house was more than a shelter from the scorching sun and monsoon rain. It was a sanctuary. The violence and abuse ceased: Ranji distanced herself from relatives who had been abusive to the children. All four children were together again. She held multiple jobs to pay the mortgage and feed her four children. Ranji entered yet another facet of the economic machine of capitalism, this time as a homeowner submitting to the scrutiny of financial viability as a single woman, a mortgage and extended hours of labour to provide security and safety.

Ranji carefully planned family rituals and celebrations. Every New Year's morning, Ranji left a multi-page letter at the foot of each child's bed. In the letters, she acknowledged their achievements in the previous year and encouraged them with feedback on areas to work on in the coming year. Education was an important theme. She encouraged them to study hard. She wanted them to achieve their dreams. This was now her new dream. She was building a home in which her four children could build their dreams, a home that would catapult them out of a life of poverty into new horizons, new possibilities and new dreams.

Andrew, as son and his mother's executor, remembers:

> The year before my mother died, she asked me if I could finalise the deed to the house as it was still in the land office. After two days of getting the run-around from one unit to another unit in the government department, I finally had the deed in my hands. I remember my mother's face when she held the deed in her hands. She hugged me. She then sat and stared at the deed for a long while. She could now write her will. This deed was more than a deed to her house. It embodied her legacy. My mother appointed me as the executor of her will and discussed the will with me before she died. She wanted the house to go to my sister to ensure that my sister never had to go through what she had gone through. Whatever circumstances my sister would face, she would have a house to keep her family together.

We draw attention to this deed for the tiny terraced house, linked to a row of houses that shared their side walls in Seremban, Malaysia. The deed represents connections and commitments. The piece of paper did not erase the marks of the hard labour, the struggle written on Ranji's body. Andrew and Ranji carried the memories, the marks on their bodies, and at the same time, they experienced the force of joy as their hands touched the deed, their eyes cherished the deed, their eyes met each other; and transformation, becoming, became possible.

Autoethnography and Becoming

A process of *becoming* emerged on and from the pages of the autoethnographic dissertation and changed experience beyond those pages. Andrew's autoethnographic text both captures and produces these moments of rhizomatic becoming.

As a Malaysian-born Sri Lankan Tamil, a person in between multiple cultures, Andrew had many experiences that can be described as being positioned as "different-other". In his research, he positioned himself even more explicitly as in-between, moving even more overtly into being in the middle (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987). With this purpose in mind, he invited three generations of women to speak into his "becoming different" as he researched and wrote his autoethnography. In the next section, we call on the relational wisdom and learning that became possible through Andrew's autoethnography and how this became visible and grew into in his family therapy practice.

Andrew as Family Therapist

They are crammed together around a small meeting table, a lawyer, a mother and a family therapist, Andrew. It is a small table in a small meeting room in the offices of a small legal firm in a provincial city in Aotearoa New Zealand. (Client names and identifying information have been changed.)

The lawyer has been appointed by the court to represent the two children in the family. The children are twins, a girl and a boy. The family came to the attention of the court when the boy reported physical violence at the hands of his father. In the ensuing intra-actions in which this mixed-race migrant family became caught up—intra-actions between a migrant father's child-discipline practices, and contemporary Western practices of care and protection—the force of New Zealand law removed both children from the parents and placed them with caregivers, for the children's protection. Subsequently, the father has secured work in another city. The mother lives alone in the family's rental home.

The interventions mandated for the family include a series of interactions between the family therapist and the family. There seems to be an assumption that the problem lies in the cultural practices of this migrant family. Andrew's first

meeting with the family is intended to set up the mandated interventions. Subsequently, he meets with the parents on a number of occasions over several months to deliver a court-mandated parenting course. The father's absence from the last two meetings, due to his work in another city, provides further opportunities for Andrew to ask careful questions that once again clarify that the children's mother is not herself subjected to violence.

As mandated by the court, Andrew also meets with the children, individually and together, for therapy. For them, returning home has now become urgent: when it was proposed that they would be placed with caregivers, they expected this placement away from home to be for a few days, not months, as it has become. Despite their fondness for the caregivers with whom they have been placed, and their wish for their father to cease to use physical discipline on his son, the separation from their parents causes ongoing distress. Andrew purposely tells the children about how their parents have engaged in the parenting programme and how much their mother is looking forward to their return home.

The mother and Andrew arrive at today's meeting together. From the moment of entering the professional offices, Andrew notices the mother shrinking into herself. This is unlike her demeanour in therapy over recent weeks, but he knows that this is the first time she will meet an officer of the court without her husband present. In her husband's presence, she has always taken a culturally mandated second place. She has often been silent or silenced. He knows that her silence has been read by the court and by the care and protection systems as a submission that produces a failure to care and protect her children. But after twelve meetings with both parents together, and with the mother alone, Andrew knows that silence is more complex than this: for example, a mother's silence is described by Ohye (1998) as "eloquent and resonant" (p. 135). Andrew's understanding of the complexity of silence is a moment of rhizomatic thinking. This migrant mother is about to encounter a legal system that has separated her from her twins: it is hardly surprising that she may take a deferential position in the face of such authority. At the same time, in terms of considering what knowledge may be implicit within the act of refraining from speaking, Andrew holds both personal and professional knowledge of the multiple possible ways in which silence speaks. As he notices the mother shrinking into herself, Andrew recalls therapy conversations where she spoke clearly about parenting practices. He entered the meeting having assessed that the mother is now well positioned to protect her children in the context of the family.

The meeting has been called to advance the matter of the children returning home. Given that the father is no longer living in the family home, the children's return home appears to all involved to be the next step. But first the court requires the mother to take out a protection order against her husband (see http://www.justice.govt.nz/family-justice/domestic-violence/protection-order). The conditions of this order of the court require that the father, as respondent, does not contact the family, or engage in violence against them. The lawyer, on behalf of the court, advises the mother that this is the step she must take. The mother, Qui (identifying information changed), quietly refuses. This is the first time Andrew sees Qui step forward in this way beyond the therapy room. He recognises it as a big step for her

in terms of culture/gender. But the lawyer repeats that the court requires her to take out a protection order to provide for the family's safety. Qui again quietly refuses. A stalemate arises.

Recognising the potential significance of the step Qui has taken in her refusal, Andrew asks her about her concerns and hesitation in taking out the order. Qui replies that she wants to keep the relationship with her husband and a protection order would get in the way of this hope. Andrew asks about her desire to be with her children and to protect them. Qui replies that she wants to ensure their safety, but she does not understand why she has to take out a protection order when it is her children who are to be kept safe. Her speaking this apparent contradiction creates a rhizomatic possibility. Andrew meets with contemplative silence the contradiction that becomes evident in her words. Andrew is not surprised to hear again that Qui is committed to her children, and he understands that whatever decisions are made here could have economic implications and have implications for a future reconciliation with her husband. In this silence—that responds to Qui's refusal to take out a protection order in her name, and the contradiction that becomes evident—space opens to hear her speaking as a becoming other than she was before. Her speaking is not the refusal of a woman required to take second place, but that of a migrant woman who is working to manage the complexities of competing responsibilities, seeking to make the best of the narrow discursive spaces in which her life is currently constituted. The emergence of the rhizome—in the space created by refusal and silence—has shifted the ground between the woman, the therapist and the lawyer.

Andrew asks Qui further about her hesitation and concerns, and she speaks of her desire to keep the family together while the children's father is away. She wants to protect the children and to also keep the possibility of a relationship with her husband alive. She emphasises her responsibility to protect her children, but at the same time, she explains that she wants the freedom for her husband to see her. She indicates a clear understanding that the court forbids him to see the children until he has met all the requirements set out by the court at the outset of this situation. Andrew again understands that Qui is seeking choices that will keep the family together. Qui makes a case for seeing her husband, while not advocating that he see the children. The terms of the protection order that the court requires her to take out do not make it possible for her to see her husband, and that means she cannot fulfil her hope of finding a way to keep the family together. Andrew turns to the lawyer and asks whether the legal system offers any other way forward, any way to protect the children while keeping open the possibility of the marital relationship's having a future.

At first, it appears that the stalemate will prevail. The lawyer expresses her concern for safety of the mother. Qui replies that she is not afraid of her husband. The lawyer asks Qui if she would call the police if there were problems. She says she would. She reports that she herself has not felt unsafe or afraid of her husband but that she has previously deferred to her husband's culturally mandated responsibility to discipline their son, including discipline by physical means. She says that her husband's departure to another city for work is his contribution to giving her

and the children an opportunity to be a family together. A protection order preventing her husband from contact with her does not fit in with how this family is working things out. Qui is quietly dignified in her replies, in the face of the lawyer's gentle but insistently probing questions.

Again, in support of Qui's quiet persistence, Andrew asks the lawyer if there is any possible option that could allow Qui and the children to be together without a protection order in Qui's name. This question gives impetus to the rhizomatic possibilities that had been lingering as traces amidst the speaking, silence, people, documents, and furniture, in this small room. Up, through the middle, an unanticipated moment of becoming emerges, as the stalemate is broken and an alternative course of action becomes available. The decision is made that a protection order is to be taken out, not on behalf of the mother, but on behalf of the children. In this way, the court's requirements for protection are fulfilled, and simultaneously the mother's hope of caring for and protecting her children, and keeping her family together, is realised. This moment of becoming that emerges in the middle of things—in the midst of struggle, of the power of the law, of vulnerability, of professional responsibility, of lived experience of separations—is a becoming for all who are present, for the lawyer, for Qui and for Andrew, as therapist-in-relation.

Narrow Discursive Spaces

At the start of this article, we signalled our interest in practices of therapy woven with the "more complex understanding of context, of multiplicity, and of social justice" that Dickerson (2014, p. 412) argues for. Migration is complex, and as Fraktman (1998) demonstrated, it is too easy to assume deficit as migrant families negotiate multiple cultures, economics, education, family practices and legal processes. As a family therapist, Andrew is also subject to the force of the law at the outset of the work with Qui and her family. At first, his own migrant status seems something of an impediment, in the narrow discursive space that appears to be available to him to engage with this family and to undertake court-mandated interventions, overseen by statutory authority. What can therapy do in the face of what this family is up against?

Taking this question to professional supervision, Andrew paid attention to this experience of a doubled marginalisation—on one hand the migrant family and on the other his position as a (migrant) therapist. In an outsider witnessing consultation with Kathie and his class peers, Andrew came to remove the brackets from the term "migrant" and to highlight this word as he retold what he was contributing to the multiplicity of this assemblage of family/court/child protection agency/school/lawyer, out of his own experiences of migration, of difference from the dominant culture in which he had become domiciled and from his professional expertise. What did his particular knowledges bring that was otherwise unavailable? What might that mean for this family? How might this whole assemblage come to benefit from the particularities of Andrew's professional contributions and multiple

lived experiences? The witnessing conversations, out of which these questions emerged for Andrew, served as a means of rhizomatic becoming. In the account of his practice told and retold, Andrew emerged in the middle of, indeed pivotal to, what became possible for the family to do.

Becoming Rhizome

Our story of the meeting between Qui, the lawyer and Andrew offers a glimpse of practices that emerged alongside this family. In the midst of legal/therapeutic processes, unpredicted becomings occurred, rhizomatic expressions of Andrew's own family life in his professional practice.

> [A rhizome] has no middle: no trunk. And it has no end: no leaves. It is always in the middle, always in process. There is no particular shape it has to take and no particular territory to which it is bound. It can connect from any part of itself to a tree, to the ground, to the fence, to other plants, to itself. (May 2005, p. 133)

In asking how Andrew's autoethnography and his lived experience were present in his family therapy practice, we find the explanatory force of the Deleuzo-Guattarian metaphor of the rhizome attractive. We do not argue that Andrew's therapy practice is a tree that grew from the roots of Andrew's childhood, through the trunk of his adult life, and the branches of his professional education. Rather, we suggest that, just like the rhizome, therapeutic practice has no centre; it is always in process. We do not claim that there is some linear causality between the self-writing and re-membering of the autoethnography and Andrew's therapeutic self and practice. Rather, these side-by-side stories—autoethnographic writing and professional practice with a family—illustrate a multi-directional, rhizomatic and multiple becoming.

The stories of mothers (Ranji and Qui) and their children meet in a network of random connections. All three children were removed from their family home in a moment of family crisis, and all three came to understand the care with which their mothers continued to work to parent them throughout this separation. Andrew positioned himself to learn from Ranji and her life, and what he learned emerged in unexpected ways as he met with Qui. He came to understand how both Ranji and Qui worked to produce small everyday practices (Coll et al. 1998) that resisted dominant and oppressive descriptions of women and mothers. For example, Ranji might have been expected to marry again, or to leave her son in a home where there were two parent figures, and Qui might have been expected to end her relationship with her husband to ensure protection for her children. But Ranji remained single and persevered in her visits to her son over seven years until she could bring him home, and Qui persisted in valuing her marriage relationship, working towards its continuance while safely mothering her son and daughter. Ranji took the bus to visit her son, she brought him home, she bought a house, she worked three jobs, she wrote letters, and she gifted the deed of her house to her daughter. Qui attended a

parenting course, she maintained a home in the family's rental property, and she refused to sign a protection order that did not also protect what she valued. Ranji and Qui produced non-conformative mothering:

> We need not conform. Indeed, if our lives are to be interesting ones, capable of new feelings, new pleasures, new thoughts and experiences, we must not conform. Deleuze offers us a radically different way to approach living, and an attractive one, as long as we are ready to ask anew what it is to be *us* and what it is to be *living*. (May 2005, p. 25)

Both Ranji and Qui showed Andrew what not conforming might do. Andrew learned to read these actions as possibilities for ethical living. He brought patience, observation, refined inquiry and openness to being taught by women—to the autoethography, to the therapy and to this current writing.

Particularly poignant as we write now is that without their having shared a physical meeting, the lives of Ranji and Qui come together in processes of becoming through the ways they forged relationships with two particular legal documents. Significant personal and social and political meaning is invested in these documents, which produced significant becomings for both women and both families, *becomings* that were emergences not end points. A deed of ownership signifies Ranji's refusal to conform to her culture/time, and how hard she worked, over time, for what was important to her in her life as a mother and as her legacy. The protection order on behalf of her children signifies Qui's refusal to conform to the dominant practices in her country of migration, at the same time as she used the law to provide protection for her children. Andrew wrote in his autoethnography that the title deed meant more than a deed for a house: it was Ranji's legacy. But he could not have predicted the ways in which Ranji's legacy would also be expressed through his responses to Qui's calm insistence that a protection order in her name was not the way forward. Both women, Ranji and Qui, came to hold legal documents in their hands, and in both situations, the documents expressed more than the legal phrases could imagine. They held in their hands legal documents that expressed what they cared deeply about.

Conclusion

This chapter has made a beginning in exploring the emergence of therapy practice in rhizomatic relationship with lived experience, re-membered through autoethnographic research. Autoethnography writes the self in relationship with culture, exploring a culture or indeed several cultures through a retelling of one's relationships with others and with the practices of one's culture. This is a story of professional education and professional practice, a rhizomatic telling of becoming therapist, an acknowledgement of the privilege of learning for the three of us who have come to write this work together. This telling is made possible only through the gifts of knowing something of the lives of Ranji and Qui.

> The past is never closed, never finished once and for all, but there is no taking it back, setting time aright, putting the world back on its axis. There is no erasure finally. The trace of all reconfigurings are written into the enfolded materialisations of what was/is/to-come. Time can't be fixed. To address the past (and future), … is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' are, to acknowledge and be responsive to the noncomtemporaneity of the present, to put oneself at risk, to risk oneself …. (Barad 2010, p. 264).

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