

Transformational (methodological) shifts towards anti-racism: Revolt, realities and rhizomes

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Abstract: Many worldly concerns of today are arguably – and potentially increasingly – fuelled by racist orientations. They are institutional, structural, and individual. What is the role then, of early education, and of educational research? In what ways might research contribute to transforming orientations, towards difference, towards racism? Given the emphasis on strengthening young children’s cultural sense of belonging, teachers ask: *but what about me?* Teachers’ own marginalisations remain an under-researched area, a situation which is further exacerbated in the highly diverse contexts of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, where further immigration is encouraged to fill dire teacher shortages. This paper draws on teachers’ storytelling of realities and of transformations towards diversities and explicit racist behaviours in Australia and Aotearoa. The research is funded by the Australian Research Council, obtained University of Melbourne ethical approval, and involves 23 participants. In this paper I draw on 1 teacher’s narrative to explicate experiences and orientations in early childhood settings. I argue for feminist philosophical research approaches foregrounded by Kristeva’s notion of revolt, as a state of constant critical questioning. Further, the notions of teachers’ realities and rhizomes elevate the importance of a reorientation of attitudes beyond racism in research and teaching for teachers of young children. Doing research *and* difference differently, I argue, is crucial for raising awareness of and respecting diversities in more equitable, less racist ways.

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Introduction

‘we’ are not one and the same... the human needs to be assessed as materially embedded and embodied, differential, affective and relational (Braidotti, 2019, p. 11)

Many worldly concerns of today are arguably – and increasingly – fuelled by racist orientations. They are institutional, structural, and individual, with local, global and environmental impacts, and cannot be dealt with, for instance, simply by outlawing or criminalising racist actions (Gillespie, 2025). In this paper I argue that the role of education, and of educational research, are critical in fostering anti-racist orientations and attitudes in society. With this I refer to orientations and attitudes that rupture the perpetuation of prejudice, oppression and exclusionary mind sets and behaviours. Shifting orientations needs to begin with the youngest members of society: the children in early childhood (EC) settings, through modelling by the adults in these settings. Racism, however, is a delicate subject. Throughout the paper I therefore suggest that it matters *how* we approach educational research, if the aim is to challenge systems to eliminate racism (hooks, 1994). This paper is an attempt to reconceptualise research approaches to transform societal attitudes, towards the diversities at the root of racist orientations, when “‘we’ are not one and the same” as Braidotti (2019) reminds us in the opening quote. Motivating questions are, for instance, what happens when the fact that we are not one and the same leads, even unwittingly, to racist or oppressive behaviours, that is, those that marginalise, discriminate against or exclude certain members within EC teaching teams on the basis of their culture, race or ethnicity? And what are we perpetuating if we do not intervene in some way? I draw on an Australian Research Council (ARC) project and feminist philosophers and anti-racist scholars, to elevate the experiences of those who are marginalised or

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oppressed. This means doing “all we can to document, to highlight, to study, to celebrate, and most importantly to create work that is cutting-edge, that breaks through silences and the different walls that have been erected to block our vision, of ourselves and of our futures” (hooks, 2009, p. 147).

The project I focus on is based on EC teachers’ (throughout this research I use the term ‘teachers’ to refer to teachers, educators, and other adults engaged in the teaching of young children in early childhood settings in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand) multimodal storytelling of their experiences of racism and othering within their teaching teams. Its importance lies in the influential role that teachers and their well-being play in young children’s lives, as the ways that their attitudes towards otherness, assumptions and biases within their teaching teams model behaviours for children in EC settings. In this paper I take up hooks’ (2009) call to explore ways in which research approaches might dismantle the different walls that seem to block teachers’ vision, of anti-racist futures. As the researcher, my own positionality is strongly implicated in this project, so I first situate myself within the study. Then I locate the research within its geopolitical and societal context, before introducing a methodological approach involving the philosophical notions of Kristevan revolts, teacher realities and Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomes and how these notions might help to break through silences and create spaces for insights into the nuances and tangents that inhere in teachers’ experiences of race and racism. For the sake of depth and consistency, I focus on one teacher, Meera (Pseudonym), and her realities within the sector, wider community and society. Her storytelling acts as a provocation for reconceptualising research (and hopefully pedagogies) in a sector where, as Meera herself states, ‘prejudice prevails and thrives’.

Why Me and Why This Research?

As a colonised country Australia is built on a long Indigenous history and waves of immigration, including an increasingly non-English speaking demographic (Crabb, 2021). My parents arrived in one of these waves, during what was called the White Australia Policy (1901-1970s) – allowing them at least to look like they belonged here when they arrived. My father was born in Jerusalem, my mother in Wilhelma, in the German Templar settlements in Palestine, or what we now know as Israel (The Templers are an “independent faith community” first established in the Black Forest, Germany, in the 1860s). Following World War II the German residents in these settlements were uprooted, both of my parents as children, sent into the unknown. My father’s family went to Germany, my mother’s family was sent from Haifa to the Golden Sands refugee camp in Cyprus (Blaich, 2009). Both, eventually, ended up in Melbourne, Australia. I was born to first generation immigrants, on the outskirts of Melbourne. German is my mother tongue, and as a child, my large extended family, and the Templers in the community, shaped my life as I knew it, in German. I grew up amongst members of the re-established communities of German Templers, however, suburban Melbourne Britishness dominated my early schooling experiences. The name calling, sneering, and labelling caused me to mask my Germanness (Arndt, 2017a), attempt to hide my otherness, and fear playtime at school, as this meant ‘chasing the Nazi’ time, to me (Silin et al., 2024; Silin et al., 2025). Still now, whilst I manage to laugh off comments referring to my Germanness, my early experiences remain deeply and viscerally rooted as an impetus for this research.

Geopolitical and Societal Context

In the already highly diverse contexts of Australia and Aotearoa, my experiences are far from unique. Teachers’ own cultural diversity and sense of belonging remain a desperately under-researched area (Arndt, 2018; Arndt & Bartholomaeus, 2025; Fenech, et.al., 2022). Societal orientations and attitudes need to be transformed early. This is recognised in the Aotearoa and Australian early childhood curriculum frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2017; Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2022) and corresponding mandates, where teachers are called on to nurture young children’s cultural wellbeing and sense of belonging. Whilst framed as a world first bicultural document that foregrounds the Indigenous Māori, and focuses on children’s development of a strong sense of identity, language and culture, the Aotearoa curriculum *Te Whāriki* makes no reference to race or racism. It refers 45 times to ‘culture’. The Australian framework *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* refers once to racism, when it suggests that “Culturally responsive educators” ... implement “anti-bias

approaches, including social justice approaches to address racism/bias in the setting/community" (AGDE, 2022, p. 24), and 71 times to 'culture'. Both frameworks call for teachers to support children in developing culturally strong relationships. There is no mention of teachers' cultures, leading to teachers asking: *but what about me?*

The growing cultural and linguistic diversity in both countries heightens the importance of an openness to diverse ways of knowing and being. It raises the danger that minority cultural experiences and values become negatively stereotyped, marginalised, unheard, homogenised (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010), or unquestioningly assumed to add beauty or richness (Papastephanou, 2015) to society or to the EC curriculum. While showing positive orientations towards some contributions of immigrant populations within Australian society (Scanlon Foundation, 2020), societal concerns with superficial treatments of difference have been elevated recently, especially when the governance of EC education is often economically rather than educationally driven (Smith & Campbell, 2018). These concerns exacerbate already existing global issues with the marginalisation of the EC teaching profession (Arndt, 2018), lack of attention to teacher cultural belonging (Srinivasan, 2017), and concerns with EC teachers' health and wellbeing rising in prominence since the Covid-19 pandemic. These concerns are further amplified when immigration is relied on to fill dire teacher shortages in the EC sector (Gide et. al., 2022) and, more widely, when teacher retention remains a pressing issue in EC and across sectors (Jackson, 2021; McPherson & Lampert, 2025).

The project that I draw on arises within the historical and contemporary background of racial and cultural diversity and marginalisation in Australian and Aotearoa society. For the purposes of this paper I will focus mostly on Australia, which seventy-six percent of the population still see as a racist country (Crabb, 2021). Whilst the Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) outlines the importance of maintaining "a peaceful, harmonious multicultural society", the intention of this research is to address what appears to be an ill-informed picture on "racism and inclusion in Australia" (Reconciliation Australia, 2021, p. 4). The urgency of addressing racism rests within dominant contemporary discourses reflected in still unanswered calls for research into teachers' identities, including silencing practices towards EC teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Guo, 2015; Xu et.al., 2025) and undocumented colonising in Western-dominated teaching contexts (Srinivasan, 2017). In a multicultural society such calls are contextualised within socio-political imperatives that govern the EC sector, including encouraging teachers to "challenge stereotypes and biases" to promote and maintain "a culture of inclusiveness" (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2020, p. 241). Diversity remains seen as a problem in EC education, to which there is expected to be a solution (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2017). This research illustrates that it is not so simple. As I suggest in this paper, breaking through silences in new and different ways is necessary to foster anti-racist attitudes and equity through teaching teams, to children and to wider society. Whilst acknowledging that there is a frequent focus on, even an expectation to use, critical race theory (Tembo, 2021) in interrogations of racism, the purpose of this paper is to reconceptualise how else research might be conducted in this field. It does this through a feminist poststructural framing using the notions of revolts, realities and rhizomes, through Meera's storying.

Method- *'Prejudice Prevails and Thrives in the Sector': Introducing Meera and the Study*

EC teachers were invited to participate in this research from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland. 13 teachers joined from Melbourne, 6 from Sydney and 4 from Auckland, with no teachers taking part from Brisbane. In the remainder of this paper I reconceptualise methodologies, through Meera's story, as an illustration of potential research treatments and encounters to confront and elevate the prejudice that prevails and thrives in the sector.

First, though, who is Meera? Meera completed her EC qualifications in Australia. She works in the Melbourne area in an EC service, due, as she outlines, to her own experiences of being an immigrant parent. She introduces herself as

from a South Asian Tamil- Hindu-Indian cultural background. I moved to Melbourne 11 years ago after getting

married at the age of 29.

I'm a girl who grew up among wonderful vibrant colourful silk textiles and temples and rock sculptures and architectural marvels and lots of colours, I would call it cosmic chaos and was raised with an idea that black is inauspicious for our ancestral God. I never wore black growing up, but here I am embracing the blackest black in Melbourne. ... So who am I? A South Asian girl or a Melbournian? Or an Indian born Australian who is trying to be Australian enough? I'm in the no man's land and fighting for my place and then comes the identity.

Meera's story is my motivation to conceptualise a shift in methodologies to enable us to break through the silences that hooks (1994) refers to above. To do so I propose a rethinking through the prism of three key concepts: revolt, realities and rhizomes. Whilst I will discuss them one after another, rather than a linear way of working, these concepts continually diffract through each other and through Meera's stories. Similarly to what Moxnes and Osgood (2018) call 'sticky stories', a diffractive approach pushes for a reading and re-reading, differently engaging in stories; seeing them in different ways. Following Barad (2014) taking a diffractive approach means "re-turning as in turning ... over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew" (p. 168). Using this approach to reading the stories seeks to "explore unforeseen, not-yet-known possibilities" (Moxnes & Osgood, 2018, p. 298). Such not-yet-known possibilities arise through Kristeva's (1991) feminist poststructuralist philosophical grounding, where the notion of the foreigner, and the idea that the subject is never fully known or knowable but rather is constantly in construction, are of particular interest. Teacher subjectivities, then, are always evolving, and so, following Kristeva (1991) all of us remain unknowable, even to ourselves. There is no singular 'truth', or definitive way of seeing the self, or others, through this lens, for me, for Meera, or for other teachers.

One of the elements of Kristeva's (2014) conception of the always shifting foreigner lens lies in the idea of a constant critical questioning, which she calls revolt. A Kristevan revolt serves as a methodological rupture, for critically questioning research, stories of the self, and, as I suggest here, for critically engaging with racism. In what follows I suggest a methodological rupture and questioning through the notion of revolt, highlighting Meera's realities in her storying. Meera's storying illustrates the importance of such a rupture, and elevates some of the ethical, temporal, cultural and individual volatilities and vulnerabilities of difficult and often blatantly racist treatments of difference within the EC sector. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) rhizomes help us to map complexities and divergences of connections and influences in teachers' storying. Following the sharing of some of Meera's realities I suggest that a Deleuzian and Guattarian rhizomatic orientation offers insights into the nuances and potentialities for both the tangents occurring in the generation and in the reading of the multiplicities of teacher stories and possibilities for future encounters (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019; Sellers & Honan, 2007). Along with the notion of revolt, this rhizomatic orientation does not involve tracing over the past, and does not and cannot point to any specific conclusion. Rather, it helps to shape a methodological framework that allows us to speculate into new, hopeful directions of countering racism. To begin the relational and ontological reframings of research, the concept of revolt re-orientates thought towards a state of questioning, causing ruptures and reshaping orientations to both research and racism in EC settings.

Revolts: Re-orienting Thought

Revolt is a state of constant questioning (Kristeva, 2002; Stone, 2004). It forms the basis of the philosophical, methodological approach in this rethinking of research. When individuals are always in a state of constant construction, as in Kristeva's notion of the foreigner, it follows that a constant questioning and re-orientation of thought demands a constant re-orientation towards the research itself. Revolt would then open up the potential for research to be based, rather than in a desire for particular truths, methods, processes, findings, or outcomes, on the need for ongoing critical engagements. In this reconceptualisation an attitude of revolt refers to the attitudinal rupture and questioning arising from teachers' decision to participate in the research, and to confront their experiences of racism within their teaching teams and, as in Meera's case, the EC sector. Drawing on revolt as a philosophical orientation means that it is not something to employ, apply, to abstract, generalise or by which to judge certain experiences. It is not something to 'do' – for example with teacher stories (Tesar, 2021), as we might *apply* a particular method. St. Pierre (2018) helps us to expand on this idea, saying that "concepts are *philosophical*, not intended for

application to lived human experience but for *re-orienting thought*" (p. 4, emphasis in the original). The argument for anti-racist transformations through research requires a deeper re-orientation of thought, then, than mere replications or re-presentations of thought, or of predetermined, inflexible research methods. The re-orientation of thought further occurs through what we might call diffracted 'intra-storyings' as teachers and I engage revolt-fully, with and through ourselves, one another and each other's sticky stories (Moxnes & Osgood, 2018).

Kristeva's notion of revolt, then, is a provocative call not for a large scale revolution, but rather, for inner transformations. As such it opens up to questioning by disrupting, dismantling and unsettling thought. The notion of revolt is thus a critical element both for reconceptualising teacher realities and otherness and for rethinking research that is intended to elevate confrontations of and orientations towards racism amongst EC teachers. Feminist poststructuralist and feminist posthuman philosophies make crucial contributions to the endeavour of confronting the challenges of racist (and other) crises (Kristeva, 1991; Braidotti, 2022). Braidotti (2022) states that "'we' [feminists] are not One or the same... we are otherwise others" (p. 7). Adding hope through a feminist reframing of research, she adds that "feminism is an affirmative gesture, a leap of faith in what humans may still be capable of" (p. 14). Using revolt as an affirmative feminist imperative and rupture to shift towards anti-racist orientations – or what humans may still be capable of within EC teaching teams involves this kind of ongoing open questioning. It means questioning hegemonies and what they mean for how teachers view, feel and treat racism, in relation to others and, most importantly, in relation to themselves and their multiple worlds and worldings (Blaser, 2013).

For Meera, the rupture that pushed her to the need to reorient thought occurred as she was

tired of explaining who am I and not what they think I am' which, she says 'pushed me to the edge and I don't do it anymore rather I'm grieving my loss of identity and also sad for my child who can't speak his mother tongue and Indian by looks and Australian at heart.

Revolt is not a one-time event. It involves a dynamic, constantly emerging and shifting engagement with dominant attitudes and orientations. In Kristeva's (1986) words, it calls for a "ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence" and "is therefore the work of a dissident" (p. 299). As such, it is helpful in "the disruption of the colonized/colonizer mind-set" to "not simply reinscribe old patterns" (hooks, 1994, p. 6), and, in this sense, also means questioning whether we can even know or tell another's story. It means, questioning what inclusion really means, for, or according to whom? When? How do we avoid reinscribing superficial patterns of inclusion? Teachers' emerging storying pushes conceptions of culture and racism further, to indicate that there is no one way of seeing either, that they are never fixed, always fluid, questionable, with no beginning and no end point. As Meera states,

I'm tired of explaining that not all Indians are the same and that India is like Europe put together as a country. We speak more than 1500 languages and eat different foods, ... clothes, music, dance, and everything about us is different.

Some of the questions that have arisen in her teaching team continue to provoke this 'tiredness', as she continues:

Some educators have openly asked 'how can you speak good English'?

'Why do you have to come here to this Country'?

This year when I went to work, on the first day, my assistant educator looked at me and said to the other educator, 'these people', and the other person said (the same) again and rolled her eyes.

The previous teacher was an Indian and she left and I joined and they commented on me in front of my service manager and myself. 'Unfortunately', my service manager said, 'they are pretty old school and they have worked here for 20-plus years and they struggle to accept'. Unfortunately, it is not going to be an all-Caucasian crowd now, and people have to accept it. It went to a point where I had to raise concerns to the People and Culture team.

Meera's revolt, as she questions orientations and attitudes, further arises in experiences around knowledge and perceptions about 'how to' partake in Australian society.

When I'm seen as an outsider, colleagues have a preconceived notion that I don't know anything related to Australia at all. For an example, when one of the children made platypus eggs with playdough I was with the child and she said, 'Meera that's a platypus egg and a baby'. I said 'yeah the baby is called Puggles'. My educator said 'that's interesting' in an undermining tone and asked 'did your son teach you'? I said 'I teach him as we love spending time outdoors and going for hikes and picnics, and I also have a Masters degree in science and I enjoy reading'. She said, 'how do you pack your rice and curries and vegetables and go for a picnic', with a smile. I said 'we do eat sandwiches' and moved on...

To "cross boundaries to take another look, to contest, to interrogate" (hooks, 1994, p. 5) cultural practices, Meera's storying engages in catalytic movements and flows within her teaching team and otherness.

Findings - Realities: Culture Stories

In the first year of this research teachers' realities were shared in online discussions and in their submitted culture stories. Culture stories refers to teachers' multimodal narratives of their realities in and beyond their teaching teams, recognising that such stories occur within and in spite of the dominant environment in which they live and teach (Blaser, 2013). It is an open approach that allows teachers to share their story in any form that they wish: as experimental artworks, in writing, in videos, or oral storying (Arndt & Bartholomaeus, 2023) to reveal in an affirmative way, the "leap of faith in what humans may still be capable of" that Braidotti (2022, p. 14) refers to above. Culture is considered broadly as what individuals see as their realities and how they live their lives, with a particular focus on how these influence their interpersonal, intercultural relationships in their teaching teams. The underlying belief is that teachers' individual, cultural wellbeing and sense of belonging in their teaching team strongly influences the ways in which they nurture children's (and future society's) anti-racist attitudes and inclusive behaviours (Arndt, 2016).

Through Kristeva's foreigner lens, the unknowability of the other creates potential spaces for questioning, noticing ongoing evolutions and systems of domination (hooks, 1994; Kristeva, 1991). It also raises the idea of the teachers' knowledge of their own self and positioning within their teaching team. When we follow Meera's story, we see a strong desire to go beyond the hegemonic platitudes of sameness (Tembo, 2021), which would also affect how teachers in the team address other prejudices, othering practices and marginalisations. A critical questioning approach within the research raises uncertainties about the extent of teachers' knowing themselves, or their own culture, or who even has a culture. It asks in what ways teachers see themselves contributing and relating within a teaching team, and who has and doesn't have power and/or influence. Following Kristeva's conception that we are all foreigners within ourselves further suggests that, instead of any answers, what is likely to arise is a humble realisation that, perhaps, these are not questions that are able to be answered. Rather, when individual subjectivities are forever in process (Kristeva, 1998), the realities shared in teachers' culture stories are ongoingly fluid, fleeting even, and as new realisations occur, side-lines emerge, or critical past instances come to mind.

Kristeva's work influences the posthuman work of Braidotti. It contributes to the unknowability of teacher otherness by complicating intra-relationalities with all things and more-than-human beings by which or by whom they are affected (Braidotti, 2013). This means taking into consideration the influences and experiences of not only the humans by whom teachers are surrounded, but also the more or other-than-human elements, and the ways that they shape themselves and intra-relate in their teaching teams (Ceder, 2019). Meera's storying affirms this posthuman 'all in this togetherness' (Braidotti, 2022), as she offers,

I always felt that my culture had post-humanist thoughts and values at its core, we call all our rivers after women, all the animals and birds have a place in my Hindu mythology and we have a strong connection to identity through land. For an example, when we meet an Indian person we ask them, are you a Tamil? Tamils are spread throughout the world in places like Singapore, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, etc.

Early readings of Meera's storying indicate that orientations and attitudes towards diversities within teaching teams differ, including ideas about who has a culture and who does not. How to story realities, how to speak out loud about them, is constrained by those around her, such as, who wants to know, or

who wants to listen and who has the ability or the desire to see beneath long established hegemonies. Srinivasan (2018) shares similar concerns from EC settings, relating to shared stories between themselves and a child with a Tamil background. Srinivasan illustrates how racism emerges through teachers' relationships amongst each other, permeating the setting, and impacting on its openness to differences. When the aim of research is to elevate and recognise diversity and minimise racism, how should it be framed, given the nuances and delicacies of realities? How can research follow any one prescribed research path? Where does the research and where do her 'realities' begin, end, or (e)merge from? What ruptures does Meera's storying cause, and for whom? Given Kristeva's notion of how our understandings of ourselves constantly emerges, what is it in the research that opens up possibilities for Meera's storying – or not? How does what is told in her story in one moment relate to what emerges at another, even when it might be contradictory? For instance, when she introduced herself, saying 'I'm a Kindergarten teacher and I got into this sector by choice', and later rethinking this to say, 'I did not enter this sector by choice, my curiosity to learn and advocate for my son got me into this sector or I would've pursued my textile degree and moved on'. How might stories fracture or become new narratives in any given moment, and how does that reflect research methods or processes? In what ways does Meera's storying and its shifts and changes, the "certain ideas about the world and its dynamics" (Blaser, 2013, p. 548) that her narrative reflects, influence what she calls 'casual racism' and opportunities for challenging it? They appear subtle, but as in Srinivasan's experience, they affect realities in powerful ways. For instance, Meera continues

I have never heated my lunch box in the microwave when other educators are around, they either look at each other and sarcastically smile or some will openly say, 'smells like curry, I hate it'. Comments like this are done casually without knowing the impact. Casual racism is very common.

Telling her story, Meera offers more of her orientations towards education, noticing differences especially between her own background and the neoliberal, largely individualistic focus of EC in Australia (Smith & Campbell, 2018),

Elders in *our* families are always there to care for the young ones and we learnt life lessons from them. Child rearing was different, but when I started working in early childhood settings, I related to what my maternal Grandma did, feeding was a part of our culture but in our household babies were made to sit with us to learn to eat on their own very early on, as soon as they can sit on the floor. Growing up in that scene did not make me feel like my elders thought of children as incapable and to be helped. Especially since it's a matriarchal society my paternal Grandma lost her husband very young and she was a strong woman who raised us very strongly. She always told my older sister and me that we bear the burden of all women in our family who's gone without an opportunity to study and that we have to succeed in our education.

As Meera tells these stories she challenges the paradigms of domination in her EC experiences. Framing research around the notion of revolt helps to drive it beyond what St. Pierre (2018) sees as a "conventional humanist qualitative methodology" (p. 4). That is, to go beyond linear, pre-adopted methodologies, where a certain process is decided upon prior to commencing the research, which is then applied to "organise, contain and describe human experience" (p. 4). To make space for transformational shifts in how we think about, are affected by and conduct research on racism in EC teaching teams and services requires first and foremost a reorientation of thought towards teachers' racist attitudes and orientations as a whole (Tembo, 2021).

The feminist poststructuralist philosophies in which this research is framed support this argument. When we are all always subjects in process, affected not only by our own experiences but by the things, elements and beings by which we are surrounded (Braidotti, 2013; Ceder, 2019, Kristeva, 1991, 1998), a pre-specified methodology becomes impossibly (unworkably) rigid. Whilst a process of data gathering may need to be outlined at the outset (not least to satisfy ethics approval processes), re-presenting realities and their inevitably entangled intra-actions with forces and energies that may or may not be evident to the researcher is a process that carries enormous and unknowable responsibilities (Shelton & Flint, 2019).

Such unknowabilities and uncertainties might be explained by what St. Pierre (2021) calls a refusal of methodology. It is what emerges within teachers' storying, in its depth and criticality that positions the research as a contested practice rather than an innocent pursuit of knowledge. The entangled realities of difference, for individuals, for the EC sector, and for research re-presentations reaffirm the crucial need for

re-orientations towards treatments of the other and of the research. As Meera continues,

we all crave for that friendship at workplace and the need to create a community for ourselves. I understand that my colleagues are not my friends and I'm not there to make friends but having a cordial and respectful work relationship goes a long way in supporting mental well-being. Its a long way to go. That's when an immigrant like me feel like I don't belong and continuously working in a place where I have to work against my values causes burnout.

So, in summary of these two sections, revolts and realities, revolt drives the poststructural rupture that provokes questioning, and Meera's storying is both a response to and a continuation of this provocation. To follow, a way of thinking through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome offers a useful conceptual framing for the divergent developments of the narratives, and for reading the storying that allows for, rather than contains, the divergences and nuances arising.

Discussion - Rhizomes

A rhizomatic lens offers an opportunity to think with the shifting nature of discourses and experiences arising in Meera's storying. My own story plays out a rhizomatic lens, as, although many years have passed since 'chasing the Nazi time' (Silin et al., 2024), it affects how my visceral reactions to racism in EC settings place me always in the middle, constantly overflowing into the EC sector. Through the rhizome there can be "neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which [realities] grow and which it overflows" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 22). Meera's storying elevates the importance of such a 'middleness' vibrantly and variously affected by her reality. Her home, her past occupation, her experiences in EC, her associations with food, with animals, with the post-human convergences in her current and previous realities, plug into each other as "lines of flight and intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). As a conceptual grounding for analysis Sellers and Honan (2007) suggest that a rhizomatic reading "follows the lines of flight that always/already connect different systems in order to provide accounts of (e)merging (mis)readings" (p. 147). It is this lens that offers a provocation for reorienting anti-racist research. Sellers and Honan (2007) further outline that "discourses operate within a text in rhizomatic ways" that is, "they are not linear, or separate" and "any text includes a myriad of discursive systems, which are connected to and across each other" (pp. 145). Following on from Meera's narrative on connections with nature and culture above, her orientation to the world is closely entangled with the things and beings, shaping behaviours and orientations, in her environment and in her way of being. They all are discourses colliding in her/their own myriad ways. Meera says,

we were enmeshed in the identity of language and geographical locations. I come from a very interdependent background where independent behaviours are frowned upon. We functioned as a unit and not as an individual.

Whilst I frame this paper around rethinking research methodologies to strengthen anti-racism in EC settings, the focus could, more superficially, be on culture. (Mis)readings of realities might stem from a purely anthropological cultural understanding, where culture and race are about being human. This might mean that it deals with human ways of living, encompassing elements of power, control and domination, and arise in various geographical, political and social contexts (Ferrández, 2013; Giamminuti, 2023). Such framings offer a useful springboard for thinking and doing cultural difference differently from the perspective, for instance, of Ingold's view (in an interview with Ferrández), where he posits that, even if that were so, rather than being a certainty, "culture is the name of a question, ... not the answer" (Ferrández, 2013, p. 299). This again, then, provokes dissident ruptures to thinking with St. Pierre on how we conceptualise research, through Deleuze and Guattari's work as "a provocation for thinking ontology differently" (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 1080). A rhizomatic reading could again elevate Meera's storying as having no beginning and no end, as being always in some sort of middle. It could be seen as intra-storying, with, alongside and/or through itself and its different elements, through me, rupturing racist orientations along the way. After all, rhizomes, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) remind us, are not fixed or singular, but always multiplicities.

This notion helps us to deconstruct hierarchical structures in EC settings and especially in teaching teams, by allowing for more than one way of being. While there is prejudice, as Meera reminds us, there may be other ways of relating to others or others' storying. Meera's storying conveys embodied,

affective/affected and entangled realities, arising through relationalities, temporalities and interconnections. Through its multiplicities it leads to new directions in the dialogues and intra-relationships, and is always “connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5). Meera’s connections with her story above about her duty to educate herself, her relationality with her own family values, the past, and others in the EC setting lead to further rhizomatic lines of flight as she continues that as a

good educator... I could give a person space to get comfortable and build trust... it is not easy to trust when everything around a person is new and not having the community/village to raise a child. Especially we have a great deal of immigrant population. All the young families had a great rapport with me because I could give them time and space to feel comfortable and did not once question their parental choice or make them feel that their practice was inferior.

I have great memories with families and haven’t come across one family that had issues with my teaching or caring for the children. Even if they are sceptical in the beginning they always warm up and build relationships with me. I’m still in touch with some families and they still send a card for Christmas.

I believe that where I come from and my value system plays an important role in my teaching. When families hesitate to send their cultural food or that they have certain preferences, I always say, they come here to learn new things and not to lose who they are. So the families always appreciate it.

Through a rhizomatic lens Meera’s realities shift and change. They create both uncertainties and ruptures, and positive connections and relationalities in the EC community, as for instance, Tembo (2021) and Srinivasan (2018) also outline. Meera illustrates ways in which realities without “conventionally linear beginnings and/or endings” can lead to “a network of interconnections” and “an amassing of middles amidst an array of multidirectional movement” (Sellers & Honan, 2007, p. 146). Rhizomatic readings, then, offer spaces for viewing, tentatively and non-conclusively, the affirmative gestures Braidotti (2022) refers to above. Meera’s conception of her own culture illustrates a fluidity, constantly shifting through multiple texts/tellings/inner questionings, showing how a rhizomatic orientation to the research opens possibilities for making visible hidden connections. In this narrative connections are revealed between the familial expectations to study, a power in herself and her confidence following her studies,

after 5 years of not embracing my identity, after I started studying Grad Dip..., I wore a saree to my workplace and I was proud, I did not stay undercover anymore, I was proud of my heritage and I embraced it and since then I wear my Indian clothes with pride. I realised that end of the day, I can’t hide my heritage or what makes me ‘me’. I believe being comfortable in the uncomfortable is the first step to change. So, after moving to this country, I learned that I’m never going to go back to India and feel I’m Indian enough or live here and think I’m Australian enough. I think it’s the curse of every immigrant.

A rhizomatic lens calls into question what it means when clothing is racially limited (Srinivasan, 2017). Unless it is Harmony Day – a day that is celebrated in Australia on the 21st March, on the United Nations’ International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2025). Harmony Day is intended as a celebration of ‘everyone belonging’, where all are respected. It is commonly ‘celebrated’ in early childhood settings. Dissonances arise, however, when we consider Meera’s storying as multiplicities, rhizomatically shifting in their telling, encounters and her own revolt-ful questioning and of the ‘curse’ of feeling Indian enough, or Australian enough to live in either country. Who can make these decisions? Whose stories are celebrated? Who speaks up, and who listens? Whose languages, food, dress, jewellery are spoken, eaten, or worn, especially beyond Harmony Day? What does it mean, in this respect, for humans to be ‘materially embedded and embodied, differential, affective and relational’ as Braidotti (2019) notes in the opening quote to this paper, and what if what is felt as respect or belonging one day changes on another (like the day after Harmony Day), as multiplicities shift and change?

Meera’s storying illustrates that as a teacher, she, like rhizomes, continually establishes herself in previously unknown ways, branching out, diversely affected, reconnecting and re-establishing herself. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state that “one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways” (p. 12). This storying is not fixed, then, but always becoming, being ruptured, destabilised, reconnected – only to be re-ruptured by new influences and entryways. It comes

into relation with me, with the other teachers, and with the dynamics within her team. Meera's entangled realities are in constant movement, and, to return to Kristeva, constant construction and, as Blaser (2013) reminds us, so are their narrations. Revolt offers a useful approach to critical questioning and engagement with aspects of teachers' lives such as immigration to a new country, changing jobs, moving to a new area, changing careers, or changes in teams within their EC settings. Fundamental to reorienting thought through the notions of revolt, realities and rhizomes is an ethics of care – towards thought itself, to the research and to their team.

Re-orienting Thought: Revolt, Realities and Rhizomes

So, what is the leap of faith that is required, that humans may still be capable of, as Braidotti alludes to earlier? Re-orienting thought towards research methodologies that aim to challenge racism in EC teaching teams is complex, multifaceted, difficult to pre-design, pre-organise or predict. And yet, institutional ethics processes frequently require such work – adding an extra responsibility on researchers. How then might philosophically grounded research drawing on revolt, realities and rhizomes, work in practice? How might there be ways to foreground to institutional ethics committees the crucial importance of an ethical engagement with thought that such an approach requires (Tesar, 2021)? It would be critical to articulate carefully the importance of disrupting the status quo, the revolt, that recognises that things cannot continue as they are. Meera frequently reminds us of this. Further, it would mean outlining to ethical review committees the necessity of offering diverse tangential possibilities, spaces and methodologies for storying to emerge, for realities to be narrated, shared. These are teachers' dialogic engagements with themselves, with each other, with the research, and with the researcher (Arndt, 2017b). A rhizomatic lens offers a way of not only allowing but expecting potential divergences and diverse directions in the entire approach to the research, throughout the process, along lines of flight, stops and starts, middles and multiplicities. Meera's in-between and shifting ways of being and how they lead to her future, not as dichotomous, one or the other, but as critical engagements with her own otherness, even to herself (Kristeva, 1991), emerge, as she outlines again

it hasn't changed over the years despite an increasingly diverse population, despite children from different cultures coming to the services. It is tiring to explain about me and also to advocate for children from different backgrounds.

CALD-background children were always treated differently and commented on and it annoys me so much as it always makes me lose hope for my own child's wellbeing in this country and makes me lose my sense of belonging in that community.

It also greatly influences my teaching and I treat the children with dignity and respect and that makes my co-educators understand the way they have to be treated with no bias, at least in front of me.

Re-orienting research methodologies to elevate anti-racist potentialities in teaching teams, then, may require not just an orientation to the storying, but rather, a diffractive sharing and reading of the research approach overall. This might lead towards "creative and unexpected provocations, strengthening these, rather than using an atomistic binary logic to compare one with the other" (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019, p. 2). An approach to such an intersectionality, following Crenshaw (1991), could take account of teachers' multiplicities within the EC sector, of how they are read through one another, and of the multiple tangents that each story and the research takes. Meera's storying indicates that an intersectional approach to openness and fluidity may help us to re-orient research methodologies, as Murriss and Bozalek (2019) continue, through a Baradian diffractive reading. What might her storying offer to others? What do the differences she 'explains about' mean to others, her colleagues, or to some but maybe not to all? In what ways might this research support Meera to regain hope? Is that the goal? Is it possible for teachers to treat others with 'dignity and respect' when they do not experience it themselves? A diffractive reading is relational, it is "different from critique in that text/oeuvres/approaches are respectfully read through each other in a relational way" (p. 2). Research methodologies that aim to elevate anti-racist attitudes should provoke and push, then, for divergent relational readings, through and alongside each other, rather than following rigid, pre-determined pathways. And furthermore, ethical processes and attitudes should open up to such arguments for diffractive intersectional readings. If research is intended to shift attitudes and

behaviours towards racism, this calls for ontological and epistemological re-orientations of thought. By suggesting that we “need more than a ban on Nazi salutes to fight racism” Gillespie (2025) addresses this very point by suggesting that perhaps rules stifle gestures and overt displays of racism, but they do not change the thinking from which they arise.

Conclusion

This paper suggests a feminist philosophical approach to research that might elevate anti-racist practices and orientations in EC teaching teams through the notions of revolt, realities and rhizomes. I have demonstrated through the structure of the paper and through its argument an openness to methodological ruptures and uncertainties where both the research and the storying that emerges move and flow, in transformational ways, through their relational engagements with realities and the EC sector. I use Meera’s narrative to illustrate some of the complexities, to create a space for a “chain of solidarity between the ‘others’, while respecting the different perspectives and lived realities of each” (Braidotti, 2022, p. 9). Meera’s storying pushes re-orientations of thought, in research methodologies and applications, towards ruptures of racist orientations through a Kristevan notion of revolt, that is, through ongoing, critical questioning. Approaching research through a rhizomatic lens has posited that not only realities but the research itself are multiplicities, fluid, inter and intra-connected in knowable and unknowable ways, rather than following preplanned directions or pathways.

The uncertainties outlined in this paper raise necessary unpredictabilities, that are unsettling, and that do not satisfy expectations of a simple, straightforward response to developing anti-racist frameworks. They actively avoid (re)homogenising themes, summaries, or rewording, of Meera’s storying and experiences. Instead, they show the deep vulnerabilities and commitment of sharing stories and they open further possibilities for ongoing storying about how antiracism is enacted, embodied, and disrupted within teachers’ pedagogical encounters, and how their identities and positions shape their engagement with antiracist commitments in their settings more widely. To the teachers in this research I owe my sincere gratitude. I finish with a final account from Meera,

I always know and understand that I’m never going to be treated like one among them and I have developed resilience to be in that environment where I try to regulate myself and reflect and forgive and move on. One gets tired of it and develops tough skin.

It’s not one workplace, wherever I go, I have to prove myself just because I’m from a different background. That would happen to anybody, but the experience for a person of colour is always different.

It is been 7 years and nothing has changed in this sector, but whenever I go to a teacher’s conference, I can see a large number of teachers from a wide range of backgrounds, I’m hoping that the future might be positive...

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