Of Roots Here and There

A Vegetal Story of Migration in Three Parts

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I made a panel submission, together with a colleague, to an international anthropology conference in 2022. The title of the panel was "Rooting with Plants: Towards a Multispecies Anthropology of Displacement and Migration". While accepting it, the organizers also said, "the scientific committee felt that some visiting the call for papers might find the metaphor offensive." We were asked to revise the abstract so that "nobody would be upset." Surprised by the reaction, we asked for clarification. Much later and after some insistence, we finally received a brief reply from the scientific committee: "it is the equivalence drawn between migrants and plants that might be read as offensive by some people." According to the scientific committee, "some people" would feel dehumanized because of the metaphor of rooting.

But plants are hardly ever referred to in order to dehumanize people on racial, religious, ethnic or sexual grounds (with the possible exception of invasive species). The more common trope is to liken migrants, Indigenous people, women, minorities, and all those to be suppressed and ruled to animals – a trope that projects speciesism onto racism, misogyny, homophobia and the like. On the contrary, plant metaphors are widely multivalent and their production is polyphonic.

Referring to one of these meanings, the conference organizers' reaction can be read as a response to hostile migration discourses that liken migrants to invasive species or that point to people's supposed 'roots' in places other than the country in which they have been living or even born, to disqualify them from fully belonging. In the German discourse, roots refer to ethnic identity that is defined by the ethnicity of the elders one is connected to via a blood relationship, independent of where they are born, raised and which nationality they hold. So, independent of the generations that have passed in between, a born and bred German citizen can be identified with the Turkish or Palestinian roots, and people who have been living in places thousands of kilometres away from Germany for several hundreds of years are entitled to citizenship immediately thanks to their German "roots". But the organizers could not deduct such conclusions from our abstract; quite the opposite was plainly out there already. Therefore, I read their reaction as a continuation of the debates that have marked anthropology since the spatial turn.

The spatial turn in anthropology, following human geography, took issue with the fixity of place and offered a paradigmatic change in our understanding of space as a human construct at several levels: material, legal, practical and imaginary. It provided a rich toolbox that allowed an examination of the formation of space as a product of power (Massey 2005) and the tracing of the movements of the matter and the people (Marcus 1995). Especially in critiques of sedentary views of people's relations to place, authors argued against the metaphors of roots that were seen as ascribing people to territories, and exceptionalizing and abnormalizing mobility – most importantly of migrants and refugees (Malkki 1992). Botanical language has been thoroughly critiqued, and routes were offered to replace roots (Friedman 2002), or rhizomatic understandings to replace thinking through roots (Gibas 2019 following Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Hannah Pitt suggests in her illuminating short essay (2021) that this negative view of roots illustrates a lack of knowledge about the roots, as well as a lack of curiosity about them. The primary function of roots is not to keep the plant in place but to help it extend and expand both under and above the soil. Alongside their commonly known vital role in plant nourishment, roots also connect plants with other plants and subterranean species. They communicate with their surroundings and signal deliberate messages to attract and deter other species from coming into contact. As the neurobiological core of the plant, they detect, respond and connect (for more about roots, see Baluška et al. 2006; Gagliano 2018; Holdrege 2013; Simard 2018). In brief, roots are not comparable to the fundaments of concrete buildings, as we often imagine them to be – immovable, unchangeable. To quote at length from Pitt:

> Roots are active and vital, neither simple, not natural opposites to routes nor rhizomes. Rooty metaphors informed by knowledge of plant worlds suit spatial relationships of diaspora, multiple homelands, or none. Drawing on roots being for metaphors of human-place relationships offers many threads to follow: nourishment, symbiosis, communication, coemergence. Roots need not be what we go "back to," or convey reactionary belonging favoring past times and places with one authentic identity. Plant roots suggest potential to move forward and become. (2021: 473)

Roots, in this moving forward and becoming, are also significant metaphors for people who have migrated when they reflect on their own condition. Hence, the metaphor of roots is emic as much as it is etic. Vegetal metaphors and especially roots are uttered by those who are building their lives through, within and despite migration, as much as by those who want to govern migration.

Examples of emic uses of roots abound in literature and film, but the roots as a metaphor keeps inspiring migration scholars and those working on contemporary mobilities as well (see, for example, Christensen and Jensen 2011; Gustafson 2001; Hage 2013; Lems 2018). In this line of literature, roots point to senses of belonging that do not necessarily imply a single-sited attachment and sedentariness. Unlike migration governance schemes, migration scholarship has long-established and accepted what Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller neatly say: "migrants are often embedded in multilayered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind" (2004: 1003). This formulation sits nicely with roots, but sounds coincidental, because there is hardly ever an exploration in migration literature into why

roots are actually apt metaphors to understand people's senses of belonging, connection, emplacement and displacement. This essay is an attempt to open up this field.

I will introduce three protagonists in this essay, who reflect on their lives, struggles and who they are by employing vegetal metaphors. However, their relationship with plants does not remain at the level of representation. They also have a daily, intimate connection to plants. Thus, their metaphors do not come out of pure imagination but rest on concrete, caring relations and an intimate and sensorial knowledge. The relations between migrants/displaced people and plants is an understudied subject. We know more about the significance of gardens in migrants' lives in terms of a continuation of culinary cultures (Gerodetti and Foster 2016), recreation, an enlargement of private spheres (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2017) and claiming urban citizenship (Rosol 2010); but in this literature, the intersubjective and relational dimensions of plant care is not the focus. Plants are not taken very differently than objects or landscape – things without their own biological, organic vitalities. A multispecies approach to displacement and migration is yet taking baby steps (as examples, see Alkan forthcoming; Tsymbalyuk 2023).

My interlocutors, Onurşah, Işıl and Zeliha,[1] whose accounts of their lives include ample references to roots, have been participants of the research I have been conducting (2021–2024) with migrants who came to Germany from Turkey at different times and various points in their lives, with a particular interest in their homemaking together with plants. I meet these Turkish and Kurdish migrants in their homes, balconies and gardens, and they tell me their life stories. I also ask them about the plants that have touched their lives in the past and present. They introduce them to me, reconstruct their biographies, often in entanglement with their own, and illustrate how they care for them. They also talk about past relations with the plants that populated their childhood homes and landscapes in their hometowns.

Onurşah, Zeliha and Işıl's accounts shed light on the different meanings of roots in migrants' lives and the temporal dimensions of thinking through vegetal symbolism. While narrating the multispecies worlds unfolding in their homes, they reflect on different meanings of roots. Onurşah tells how he has slowly become emplaced in Berlin together with and in close relation to plants. His narrative attests to a co-rooting, which takes time, patience, diligence and the mobilization of many other human and non-humans as companions. Zeliha explores rooting simultaneously in different places and re-rooting. She questions who she has become with migration and what the roots that were left behind could still hold, support and transfer. She wants to imagine the roots of her sons as "an extra pair of wings" as Ghassan Hage (2013: 149, quoted in Lems 2019: 22) elegantly puts it, which would give them a grounding from which they can successfully launch. Finally, Işıl asks the question of whether it is possible to root in the air and develop a fully nomadic existence that is still connected to places. Yet, as time passes, she turns more towards underground roots. As will be made clear by the parallel reading of their narratives around their plants and themselves, and by juxtaposing the three to each other, temporal dimensions of migration and the life-courses have a strong effect on the companionship of the plants and people in migration contexts. Narrations

1 Two of these names are the actual names of my research participants, who wanted to be presented as such, and one is a pseudonym.

are shaped by time – the time spent in the new land, away from the homeland, raising children, building support networks and getting older. The reader is invited to see the parallels and contrasts in my migrant interlocutors' narratives that I cite and paraphrase at length below and witness to the multiple meanings and affordances of roots through these snapshots.

Onurşah: Growing Roots

Onurşah's flat has a warm feeling to it. Cosy and sunny. It is a one-bedroom in a housing estate built in the first half of the twentieth century. Large trees dot the open lawns between the five-storey buildings, but it is still possible to see the neighbours living across the way and wave at them occasionally. Onurşah lives alone in a flat on the second floor of his building. Or rather as the only human-being in the flat. Otherwise, he shares it with several plants, some of whom he calls his friends.

Onurşah, a primary school teacher in his thirties, had come to Berlin to continue his studies 11 years before we met. After receiving his degree, he worked as a social worker until he changed track. When I approached him to take part in my research, Onurşah generously invited me to his flat, and before I asked him anything he started talking. He was bursting with stories about plants, migration and making Berlin his home, so much so that he was surprised about this abundance himself. "I was not feeling settled until five years ago," he said,

> I always had this idea of going back home, back to Turkey. Although I loved it here; although I had my job, my friends and my life here, I always felt a little doleful when I had to leave [Turkey] after my visits. Especially when I was leaving my family. I am from Antalya. In that city, surrounded with relatives, I always nursed the notion of return. I had these thoughts: I would come back one day, I would have loved to come back. I developed many return projects. Even my family developed some […] However, in the past four–five years, it started to diminish. In the last two years, I go back very reluctantly and without much desire. Now I feel I belong here.[2]

Onurşah did not tell me all these as a response to a question about his migration story. He actually took off with talking about his interest in plants, which also started to develop around the same time, about five years ago. While drifting from plants to settlement, he recognized that plants made his flat their home when he started to feel finally at home. But the causal direction was not clear. Did he start to feel at home and bring home plants? Or did plants make their way to his flat and he started to feel at home in their presence? While Onurşah's narrative suggested concurrence, he was not exactly sure which led to the other, and he switched between the two formulas during our conversation.

2 All conversations took place in Turkish. All translations are mine.

(Figure 1:) Onurşah's cactus (belonging to the Italicize Ferocactus). Photograph by the author.

The first plant to come was a cactus. It was given to Onurşah by his supervisor at work. This woman and her husband, both migrants from Turkey, were formative in Onurşah's migration journey. Onurşah became very good friends, especially with the husband, and frequently visited their house. On one such visit, the supervisor gave him a small cactus:

> There were many succulents in their flat. I developed a liking for this cactus. She dug this little cactus out from a pot which hosted many of them, stuck closely together. And she told me that it was 35 years old! Can you believe it?

He then continued, "This 35-year-old plant is going on with its life with me here, and it is also living there in its original home. I find this amazing."

In this way, by leading two lives in two different places, the cactus effectively connected them. This connection of two places, one that makes Onurşah feel at home as a guest and the other he was trying to turn into a home, eventually affected Onurşah's own attachment to place. The cactus was a surrogate of the warmth and welcome he received from his friends. This cactus and two other plants he received from this couple have a special place in Onurşah's heart, as he calls it. They are his first plants and also the ones to which he is most attached.

His friends did not only give him companion plants, they also gave him roots – the roots he has since been growing and tending patiently. When he first arrived, he did not know many people in Berlin. Cut off from his family and network of friends, he struggled:

> I came here after a certain age. One of the first things I noticed was that I would not be able to make friends as easily as I could when I was a child. You are in a foreign country. A feeling of rootlessness. What can a tree do without its roots? My aloe vera rotted; it did not work out for it. [This was a very large one he found on the street and brought home. But the plant did not survive because it was cut from the beginning of its stem.] It did not have roots. I felt like that for a long while. Feeling so rootless, you realize that you need to invest time and energy in new friendships. I am talking about something almost mechanical. I am talking about a very deliberate decision. For

> example, you pick a few decent people around you. I tell myself: create time for these people, make something out of it, build something together. Otherwise, you are very lonely. You are all alone.

Onurşah then deliberately invested in his social network, put effort in making close friends – like his supervisor and her husband – and worked in civil society initiatives with like-minded people. He slowly built his own circle which made him feel that he belonged. His own labour-intensive rooting was matched by the labour he extended to his plant companions. He decisively created a systematic care schedule for them: washing the rose, who occupies a significant space on his small balcony, every two-three days to save it from spider infestation, maintaining a strict watering regime for his houseplants to meet their needs best, identifying the different soil types they need and repotting them regularly, and, most importantly, keeping a close, attentive eye on all of them to register and act on the minute changes in their outlook and behaviour. Onurşah's own rooting is similar to the rooting of his plant companions: Both require time and care given in abundance.

> These roots also require protection; a careful possessiveness that mostly manifests itself as doting:
> [talking about the creation of civil initiatives together with other migrants from Turkey] All of this is a struggle to root. We come back to plants again. I give plants huge symbolic significance. I mean it. They are very meaningful to me. For example, I have a close friend, D., whom I really love and get on with well. I cannot hurt her and I would not let anybody hurt her. Just like that, and I really mean it, I would not let anyone to hurt this rose. They would pay for it! That's it, that's it. Very symbolic. Just as I have rooted here, it has also rooted here. We belong to each other. I see it like that. I would not let anyone to do it harm.

In Onurşah's account of migration, his own story is constantly interwoven with the stories of his plant companions. They share space, struggle together and come to belong to each other. Yet, most importantly, as Onurşah constantly emphasizes, the plants provide a blueprint of emplacement for him. They are a testament to the importance of roots and how one can root well. There are two social constellations that Onurşah interprets as roots.

> Everything goes parallel to each other. Once you are well-settled, you also have good friendships. Once you have a job, […] rooting becomes possible. Being a foreigner is very hard. I did not know it before I came here. I really didn't know. If I knew […] People ask me in Turkey: shall we go abroad? I am not like, "Don't go, there is racism there." It is not the problem. Can you cope with all this? This is the most important question. It is very hard. Coming here together as a family is a big advantage. I can tell you for certain. Of course, it also has its own hardships but having a family here means having a head start. To be able to hold on to somebody […] Like you come with your roots.

Onurşah did not have a partner at the time of our meeting and his birth family lived in Turkey. While his parents find the great distances between them painful, they also sup-

port Onurşah's decision to live in Berlin. He goes to visit them a couple of times a year. When he is in Berlin, they communicate with messaging apps and send each other photographs of their plants. Although Onurşah does not have his family with him, it does not mean that he still feels rootless. Alongside the new friends he has made, he finds his teaching job to be a significant step towards finding "his place in the sun" (Alkan Forthcoming).

> [After telling me about how precarious his job was as a social worker] Being a teacher means being a public servant. The standards are good, I mean the pay. I feel more accepted now. This job makes me equal with a German person who was born here, who studied here. You then feel more at home. It is independent of the routine, small-scale racism you encounter every day at school. We are foreigners everywhere. It is clear […] But I have the same rights as my partner teachers. The same social status. Not that I value it so much but […] All of these make you a little more settled somehow […] It allowed me to take part in daily life more, as a civil servant I mean. And this leads me to root more here.

As metaphors go, Onurşah is more invested in the process of rooting as an expression of emplacement, than the roots as a noun, which might, in the conventional understanding, refer to where he came from – traditions, ethnicity, homeland. He recognizes the demands of rooting – the care, time and structures that facilitate it – as much as its rewards. His roots are an accomplishment: a multispecies accomplishment of co-rooting.

Zeliha: Connecting Roots

Zeliha lives on the outskirts of Berlin, with her husband and three sons, in a house surrounded by a very large garden. The garden hosts a number of large trees, planted decades ago by former owners, and younger ones planted by Zeliha and her husband. Uncommon in Berlin, and typical of the central Anatolian steps, there are silverberry trees on the perimeter of the property, which Zeliha brought from Turkey as cuttings. There is an apricot tree, which her husband grew from a seed, in another corner of the garden. The husband ate an apricot when they were in Turkey one summer. He loved its taste and aroma so much that he kept the stone. Once in Berlin, he planted it in a pot and tended it until it became a robust sapling. Then he planted it in their small hobby garden in Neukölln. When they decided to move out of the city and buy a garden house, they had to sell the hobby garden. Yet, they uprooted the apricot tree, together with the cherry tree they had planted when their youngest son was born, and transplanted them both in the new garden. Both of the trees survived the stress of transplantation and flourished through their human companions' care. They even give fruit every two years or so, depending on the weather when they blossomed.

(Figure 2:) Zeliha's apricot tree. Photograph by the author.

Transplantation is also an important theme in Zeliha's account of herself. She came to Germany through marriage to a young Turkish-German man at the age of 19, as an "imported bride" as she calls herself. When we met she had been living in Berlin for more than 20 years. She struggled not only with the language and climate but also with the special needs of her first born. Her mentally disabled son thrived with her heroic efforts, and Zeliha received a job offer from the family centre to which she had brought her son regularly. She learnt German, received training and became a social worker, supporting other migrant families in their struggles.

Zeliha is known among her friends to have a great sense of humour and a green thumb. She makes everybody laugh, brightens up the darkest moods, and whatever she plants, lives and flourishes. Like her trees, she also brings lots of seeds, seedlings and cuttings from Turkey and they all survive under her care. But when I asked her if there were any plants that she could not make live in Berlin, she gave a reply that caused a big protest from her friends, with whom we were sharing a rich breakfast.

> Only myself. I could not make myself survive here. I could not make the former Zeliha live. [After exclamations such as "But you live really well! Zeliha is alive!"] Yes, this is a new Zeliha. But I miss my old self a lot. I know I look cheerful to you, but I am not as cheerful as I used to be. I do not laugh as before. I do not feel so vivacious anymore.

To this, I had to ask why, and she went on explaining,

> It must be the gloom of Germany. It is not like I have experienced something or my husband gives me any trouble. It is because people here are very cold […] Imagine a sapling. You bring it here, plant it, but it dies. But a new one emerges from below. Is it a good thing? Yes. Would that sapling live? Yes, it would live. Maybe even give fruit? Yes it would. But could it replace the original one? No, it could not. This is how I think of myself. I was a sapling. I brought myself here but I could not keep myself alive. I know I am no longer the same person.

For Zeliha, this feeling of loss is related to not living, changing and growing together with the people she knew pre-migration. After she made this comment about the sapling that is herself, she told me about how strange she felt when she did not understand a joke her nephews made during a visit to her hometown two years after her departure. Even then, the colloquial humour had changed and she felt as if she was left out.

> Then they told me that I had changed. I said, no, I had not, you had changed. I understood what they really meant five years later. When you share less and less with some people, your ties become loose. Those ties cannot die, however loose they are, but you cannot make them live either. These roots are there, but you cannot resurrect them. Because you no longer have a shared life.

While Zeliha established strong connections with friends in Berlin, founded her own family and slowly built a new life for herself, the feeling of being cut off from her roots has always lingered. Yet, actually, as she also acknowledged, those roots did not die. They still connect her to her homeland, to her own people, however loose and fragile the ties have become. She still spends almost all of her summers in her hometown and keeps what is precious to her heart also close to herself materially. She plants poppies and wheat in her front yard to recreate the scenery of her childhood in arid central Anatolia. She goes to great lengths to bring plants from Turkey and care for them during the long and dark winters in Berlin. She also dotes on some garden flowers and house plants, which are reminiscent of her sisters and good old friends. When they show signs of distress, she cleans their roots, gives them special treatment and pours affection on them, until they come out healthy again. Her plants keep her people close.

Zeliha talks about her children as her flowers too, imagining herself as the plant again. These flowers need constant and fitting care, depending on their personalities and special needs. Her eldest is an orchid, she says. He is beautiful but delicate. Her 12-year-old youngest son is a violet. Elegant and down-to-earth; resilient and independent. She does not need to do much for him, he flourishes almost by himself. Yet, her middle born is a cactus, flowering gorgeously once a year but spiky and hard to handle. All of these plants she also grows at home. So, her metaphors are nothing but superficial. She raises her sons together with the plants, with attentiveness to their particularities, be they human individuals or plants.

However, the challenge about the children is that, unlike plants, they are not emplaced in one place and one place only. They again, according to Zeliha, have roots in Turkey. And her main struggle is to "make sure that they do not lose their roots." These roots need tending; just like her plants' roots need to be checked occasionally, cleaned and cared for.

This particular attention to roots became visible to me only when I read Zeliha's transcript. Among my many interview partners she was the only one who talked several times about her struggles to save the roots of her plants; and she was also the only one who talked so much about her anxiety about losing her roots and her children losing theirs. Tending to children's roots involves taking them back regularly to her hometown so that they would know their soil, the people, and the place that nurtured and shaped their parents. It also involved taking them to a Qur'an school, where they learned to read the holy

book in its original Arabic and received religious education, and also to cultural activities of the Turkish community. It involved designing her garden house almost like an Anatolian village house, with chickens and pigeons in the garden, and a wood stove in the living room. She, who is well emplaced in Germany, is still busy with roots, as nouns, that refer to an elsewhere.

Many trees establish root systems to allow communication under the soil and they even exchange nutrients, as has been made famous by Suzanne Simard's (2009, 2018) research. Roots do not have to be individual. Roots of others and roots elsewhere can support an individual plant, protect it from pests and infections, and provide it with vital support when the plant cannot survive on its own. In Zeliha's attempt to keep herself and her children embedded in other root systems by keeping them connected to another land and their family there is an attempt to keep them healthy, resilient and well-supported.

Işıl: Rooting in the Air

Işıl is a 40-year-old artist. In 2023, when we met in her lovely turn-of-the-century flat, she was about to finish her PhD at the University of Arts (UDK). Before moving to Berlin in 2017, she lived in a. top-floor flat at a central location in Istanbul and grew a garden on her terrace. While practicing her art and becoming known in the art scene in the city, she was also enrolled in a PhD programme and worked there as a teaching assistant. Her life was full, and she had the feeling that "life was beautiful, I would work here and live here." However, the political climate changed drastically after 2013 and became suffocating. When she launched one of her feminist artworks, which was installed on top of a hotel at the Taksim Square, she felt particularly threatened. She experienced 2016 as an awful year because of the bleak developments that led to the purge of academics, journalists and many opposition intellectuals, and, finally, she applied for a paid PhD position in Berlin, which she was offered and accepted.

Before her move in 2017, Işıl photographed every single one of her plants and shared the images on Facebook, asking who would like to adopt them. Her friends volunteered. She also photographed the plants together with their new owners and kept track of who got what. She later stayed in touch both with her friends and her plants as they shared homes. She occasionally received their pictures and reunited with others when she went to visit them. She is particularly fond of one non-flowering houseplant which lives in a close friend's flat and receives a hug from Işıl whenever she visits.

Işıl's Berlin flat is also full of plants. She brought a few of them from Istanbul and from her mother's house as cuttings and grew them here. This is indeed what she loves the most – growing a baby plant and watching it thrive. This is a new phase of rooting for Işıl. Initially, she said she rooted into her private life and did not cultivate much connection to the city. During that time, she also made an artwork called "Willem Flusser and I", where she explored the possibility of rooting in air. Here is how Işıl described her photography project on her website (Eğrikavuk 2018):

> Due to my current move to Germany, I am thinking a lot about the position of the exile. Even though I am not necessarily a forced exile, however, as an artist, as a woman, as an intellectual, an academic, I feel unrooted.
> In his essay "Exile and Creativity", Vilem Flusser says, "(A human) may discover that a human being is not a tree. And that human dignity may consist precisely in not having roots. That the human being becomes human only when she hacks off the vegetable roots that tie her down."
> Inspired by Flusser's text, I did a series of performative photographs, where I pose with used and thrown away Christmas trees in different parts of Berlin every day for a week in January 2018, thus, uniting with the rootless plant. I consider this position is also an act of empowerment, meaning that instead of being the victim of the exile condition, we become grounded in the air, together.

The trees in the photographs stand upside down supported by Işıl. Their short trunks pointing towards the sky and the pointy crowns touching the ground, they are contrapuntal to Işıl's firmly placed feet. The performance carries an optimism about the endless possibilities uprootedness creates. It invites freedom and imagination to the lexicon of exile, which is overburdened by loss, displacement and thrown-out-ness. It, therefore, echoes Deleuze and Guattari's famous statement:

> We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes. (1987: 15)

Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, though, Işıl is not tired of trees. Her art makes a playful use of rootless Nordmann firs (*Abies nordmanniana*). The Nordmann firs that are widely cultivated as Christmas trees are endemic to Caucasia and Turkey, and by way of migration, they now populate German forests, mostly planted eventually to be cut very young. They symbolize a seasonal festivity, joy, family and warmth. They are then discarded on the streets. The trees in Işıl's photographic performance are not only rootless, they are lifeless. They are displaced and appropriated for a seasonal fantasy, only to be disposed of once they became unpleasant, with their needles drying and falling.

Hence, despite the hopeful text, the photographs communicate a sadness. Compared to the photographs I took at her flat five years later, capturing her intensely loving touch and compassionate gaze, Işıl in her artwork has a rather grim expression. When I asked her what she thought about rooting in the air now, she said she had never really thought about it before I asked the question. But, she said, she is putting more effort to root in the city now. Her practice of growing plants attests to that as well. She propagates many plants (such as olives, succulents, inch plant, devil's tongue, oranges, lemons, tomatoes), some of which she brought from home as cuttings and others she received from her friends, as well as those she bought from supermarkets in Berlin. She takes pleasure in seeing their roots grow in glasses of water and later firmly establish themselves in soil. She enjoys and takes pride when they thrive under her care. She attests to the physiological transformation of the rootless mobile cuttings and seeds to fully established plants with the help of the roots they have grown to take nutrients. For Işıl, rooting in the air

was a statement of hope, rooting in the soil, on the other hand, is a practice that aims at emplacement in a multispecies world.

(Figure 3:) Işıl Eğrikavuk, 'Villem Flusser and I'. Credit: Işıl Eğrikavuk.

By Way of Conclusion

Roots often refer to a notion of origins in the general discourse around migration – whether governmental or literary. They are about where one, or their ancestors, were born; their traditions, beliefs and ethnic identity. Roots are what lay behind, sometimes unnoticeably connecting a person to somewhere they no longer inhabit. Roots are also what lay behind in the temporal sense; they refer to the past. The narratives I related above, of living together with plants and reflecting on them, present a much more colourful and heterogenous picture of roots. We see multivalence, plurality and

primarily an orientation towards the future in Işıl, Onurşah and Zeliha's dwellings on roots and rooting, as well as connections to multiple places at once.

Roots, both as plant organs and metaphors, invite us to reflect on connections to place: what do we, plants and humans, get from a place, how are we emplaced, how do we find support and care at a place? The three accounts I laid out in this essay illustrate how migrants, who have an emblematic relationship to place by way of being displaced or having changed places radically, refer to roots and engage with them. So, when my interlocutors talk about roots, they talk about place and the relations that make up that place. What they are referring to is emplacement, which can be defined as a positive situatedness in a place (Vigh and Bjarnesen 2016); being well embedded in relations of care and worth (Alkan forthcoming).

The second important point about different uses of roots is temporality. How the metaphor of roots is differently employed by Işıl, Onurşah and Zeliha reflects the questions they dealt with at that given time in their migration trajectories and life-courses. For Onurşah, rooting is about finding his place in Germany. It is a question of settling, referring to a process. For Zeliha, roots are a question of where she came from and how to raise children who do not forget where their parents came from. Roots for her is a noun. Being a migrant for over twenty years, having a home, a job and family in Berlin, she is already well-settled. Rooting in Germany is no longer a question for her, however, losing her roots elsewhere is, because those roots, along with her roots in Germany, are what nourish her and her family. In her first year in Berlin, Işıl proposed rethinking what roots come to mean for an exile with a gesture of hope – rooting in air. Her question carries the openness of a fresh migrant, who found herself in a welcoming city after leaving an increasingly suffocating political environment behind.

Finally, roots refer to significant relations with other human beings. Onurşah describes making friends as an act of rooting, while Zeliha discusses roots as meaningful connections to relatives and kin. Telling how she rooted mostly into her private life and not so much in the city in her first few years in Berlin, Işıl also points to how roots do not necessarily tie one to a single place but possibly to people, through relations of care.

So, roots come in different forms, textures and depths. They extend both temporally and spatially, connecting places, people and their nonhuman companions in webs of care and support. They are essential to the well-being of plants and people alike, yet, with their multivalence and plurality, they resist essentialization. Stories of migration abound with roots but they are not the roots hostile migration politics imagine.

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