

“Sprachwurzellos”: Reflections on Exile and Rootedness

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Abstract: The paper focuses on what appears to be a remarkable topos in exile literature: the metaphorical reference to roots and rootedness as a cultural and linguistic state that is fundamentally endangered but also brought into question by exile. In many ways, literature reflecting exile experiences in the twentieth century still relies on the idea of a close interlocking of language and national belonging that took shape in the early nineteenth century in the rhetoric of a German *Kultur*nation, in the writings of Herder, Humboldt, and Fichte. While this discursive link is evoked and in some ways renewed in various texts written in and about exile – especially in the claim that the exiles represent the “other Germany” and thus are the rightful heirs to a German cultural tradition, and also in the Zionist reception of the German model of *Kultur*nation – the implied exclusivity of cultural belonging and the alleged “natural” connection of language and culture with a soil or territory are also placed in question. In “Der Schriftsteller im Exil” (“The Working Problems of the Writer in Exile”), Lion Feuchtwanger laments the hardships of a writer in exile and the impossibility of being productive when “uprooted” from home and mother tongue. However, in the same essay he contends that exposure to a foreign language and to a plethora of new ideas ultimately proves enriching for the writer. As early as 1932, in his “Psalm des Weltbürgers” (“Psalm of the World Citizen”), published as part of the first volume of the Josephus trilogy, he presents as central the idea that man is not a tree and is therefore not rooted in a given soil but able to walk around and explore the diversities of the world. Hilde Spiel’s poem “Ziehende Landschaft” unfolds the paradox of being rooted like a tree and being in motion at the same time, thereby questioning the traditional opposition of these modes. In poems such as “Sprachwurzellos,” Hans Keilson reflects upon his experience of exile as a violent loss of roots, which also gives rise to a new appreciation for linguistic diversity and for gifts offered by a country of exile, without resorting to the illusion of a restoration of originality or wholeness. As can be shown, there are many correspondences here with Peter Weiss’s essay “Laokoon,” which describes his experience of being exiled and torn from his native country and language. The paper analyzes these textual reflections and transformations of the basic root metaphor (for example, into *Luftwurzeln*, “aerial roots,” as they appear in contemporary exile texts, e.g. by Arnold Zweig) and

looks at theoretical texts on roots such as Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other*, Deleuze and Guattari's *Rhizom*, and Vilém Flusser's *Von der Freiheit des Migranten* (*The Freedom of the Migrant*).

The question of how considerations about language are intertwined with political thought is addressed in this article by examining what appears to be a remarkable topos in exile literature. At first glance, it is not particularly surprising that reflections upon roots play an important role in texts documenting the experience of being expelled from one's home country and familiar cultural surroundings. "Exile," Edward Said writes in his seminal essay on this topic, "is a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (2000 [1984], 177). While "land" and "past" might serve as examples of "roots" in this passage, the term still remains vague and open to a number of associations. But rootedness here is evoked as a powerful metaphor that signifies a state of continuity and belonging by drawing on organic images. Said's essay, which addresses exile as a general symptom of modern western politics and culture, points to the impact of the root metaphor in various languages and historical contexts. It has certainly been particularly influential in the German-speaking context, where it fostered the idea of a national culture and belonging that preceded and accompanied the formation of the German nation state in the nineteenth century. Because it is still present in texts referring to experiences of exile between 1933 and 1945 and later, the question arises whether this particular discourse of belonging, community, and identity remains unchanged by focusing primarily on rupture and loss. While the metaphor seems to be reaffirmed and strengthened by numerous evocations of violently severed roots, at the same time a number of texts demonstrate significant shifts and transformations of the root metaphor, revealing different types of subversion of the concomitant notions of identity and descent.

One example is the poem "Vienna 1967" / "Wien 1967" by the Austrian-American writer Felix Pollak, who immigrated to the United States in 1938. The poem, which Pollak presents in an English and a German version, draws upon the metaphor to express an exile experience:

Though my roots are cut off here, they hurt like an old scar when it rains / Obwohl meine Wurzeln hier abgeschnitten sind, schmerzen sie wie eine alte Narbe wenn's regnet (Pollack 1989, 114–115).¹

"Here" signifies the position of the poetic voice as being different from another, former state of quasi-natural belonging. The dichotomy between rootedness and belonging on the one hand and loss of roots and displacement on the other is called into question, however, by the jux-

taposition of the botanical metaphor with the metaphorical field of the human body. A scar testifies to bodily injury and pain; it figures as both a sign and a site of remembering and revives the idea of physical integrity as well as the moment of injury that occurred elsewhere. Thus the notion of roots is itself “transplanted”: while a plant that has been cut off from its roots generally cannot live on in another place, the scar here signifies the possibility of transcending the idea of an organism that depends once and for all on its rootedness in a certain soil. As a sign of remembering, it points to roots as something that has been lost but is still present in the conception of the self. The fact that the poem has two versions in two languages affirms this observation: if *Wurzeln* (roots) can be translated, the idea of cultural and linguistic rootedness as the necessary precondition of the poetic expression of the self becomes problematic. Exile does not primarily appear as defined by privation and loss of some irretrievable wholeness; rather it reveals an overlapping of different temporal and spatial fields, which open up possibilities of linguistic translation and cultural multiplicity.

The following passage, taken from an autobiographical narrative of exile, also describes exile emphatically by evoking the root metaphor. In her memoir *The Unforgotten*, the actor Ilse Stanley, née Davidsohn, who emigrated from Berlin to Boston in 1939, writes about her exile:

It was a trying time. Not because I lost career and money, for I had never cared greatly for material possessions. I faced greater loss. I was so rooted in German art, language, thinking; I was as German as the oak. And one cannot just tell the oak: “From today on you are no longer a German oak. You will have to pick up your roots and go somewhere else.” My roots were so deep in the German soil that it was unthinkable to tear them out (1957, 61).

By elaborating on the image of the oak tree, which, because of its deep roots in German soil, cannot possibly leave it, the text affirms the discourse of national belonging as arising from a natural bond. However, the fact that the assertion of an essential Germanness is presented here in English² contradicts the idea of the close and unchangeable link between native tongue and writing about the self. As the narrator had obviously been forced to “go somewhere else,” the image of the immovable German oak appears to be a discursive cliché. At the same time, its affirmation also draws attention to the fact that many Jewish exiles, like Stanley, had identified with German culture and even patriotism to an extent that made clichés like this one part and parcel of their identity and self-perception.³ In its affirmation by a Jewish exile, the identification with the German oak is itself presented as an ascription that can be separated from its original ethno-national context and re-located. Evoking the somewhat comical idea of an oak actively pulling

out its roots and walking off, Stanley's passage reveals the discrepancy between a tree and a human being, who can be forced to go away but can also react to acts of exclusion and persecution by subverting their rhetorical preconditions.

By adding motion to root metaphors, these texts challenge the opposition of belonging and uprootedness and reveal linguistic possibilities of rewriting common concepts of community. In Hilde Domin's poem "Ziehende Landschaft" ("Passing landscape"), written in 1955 when Domin returned to Germany after 22 years in exile, "we" could refer to a community of exiles who have been forced into "different air" ("fremde Luft"). However, the poem, originally written in German, does not leave the dichotomy of home and exile intact. In a paradoxical way, it links the intimate landscape to mobility while associating the person going away with immobility and stability.

Ziehende Landschaft

Man muß weggehen können
und doch sein wie ein Baum:
als bliebe die Wurzel im Boden,
als zöge die Landschaft und wir
ständen fest.
Man muß den Atem anhalten,
bis der Wind nachläßt
und die fremde Luft um uns zu
kreisen beginnt,
bis das Spiel von Licht und Schat-
ten,
von Grün und Blau,
die alten Muster zeigt
und wir zuhause sind,
wo es auch sei,
und niedersitzen können und uns
anlehnen,
als sei es an das Grab
unserer Mutter. (Domin 1959, 9)

Passing Landscape

We must be able to go away
and yet be like a tree
rooted in the earth
standing fast while the land-
scape passes.
We must hold our breath
until the wind dies down
and different air starts to encir-
cle us
until the play of light and shade
of green and blue
shows the old pattern
and we are home
wherever that may be
and able to sit down and lean
against it
as if it were the gravestone of
our mother.
([http://hildedomin.megtaylor-
co.uk](http://hildedomin.megtaylor-co.uk), 13.06.2014)

Here, the image of the tree firmly rooted in the earth is taken up and combined with the vision of a "migrant landscape" (Chambers 1994, ch. 2). To stay fixed and move at the same time seems paradoxical and, while it could be read as an appeal to keep to one's roots in exile, it also undermines the notion of belonging as tied to rootedness by creative tree and root metaphors.⁴ Here, "home" is not a fixed place; rather home is "wherever that may be." It is subject to change. Assumptions

about the continuity of home, space, and communal identity are thus questioned. By superimposing roots and routes, the text undermines the idea of cultural dwelling as something that precedes mobility, transgression, and transfer, which are shown to be preconditions for notions of belonging (for a discussion on the metaphors of “roots” and “routes” see Clifford 1997). If the feeling of being at home is associated with the image of “the gravestone of our mother,” it is clear that it cannot appear without evoking a deep sense of loss and mourning. But the imaginary site that is connected with the mother, that is, with an idea of origin and belonging as well as with remembrance and genealogical ties, is also explicitly associated with the image of migrating landscapes and the journey into “different air.” Thus the sense of home does not lead to a metaphorical reading of home as mother soil, but rather disrupts the discursive tradition of this metaphorical connection by presenting the mother as a point of reference that is simultaneously both present and absent and cannot be located outside an imaginative mode of speech (“as if”).

All these examples evoke in some way the rhetoric of ethnolinguistic nationalism, a central theme in the nineteenth-century concept of a German “cultural nation” (*Kulturnation*) (Ahlzweig 1994). In view of the lack of any political unity among the German territories, the idea of a community created by a shared language, literature, and education (*Bildung*) was invested with the potential to precede and surmount political unification. Influential thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte endorsed the interlocking of language with the idea of the nation in what can be described as a remarkable discursive effort, as Benedict Anderson (1983) and others have shown. In early modern times, linguistic models had described vernaculars by drawing on arboreal metaphors that suggested their organic growth in keeping with local organic nature (Bonfiglio 2010, 105–121). Now the idea of languages as well-rooted organisms with a stem (German *Stamm* means both “stem, trunk” and “tribe, clan”) and branches was thoroughly intertwined with nationalistic rhetoric and concerns (Bonfiglio 2010, 151).

In *Addresses to the German Nation*, which Fichte wrote in 1808 in an immediate reaction to Napoleonic hegemony, advanced cultural development is closely linked to the question whether a people is still connected with the root from which it originally sprang (Fichte 2013, 4th and 12th Addresses; also Bär 2000, 218–219). Only the German language, it is claimed here in a remarkably strained way, has not yet been severed from the “living root” of its origins and thus it is the only language that deserves the designation of “mother tongue,” which can serve as the basis for national development because it expresses a pure, unalloyed mental culture (*Geistesbildung*) and a national power of imagination (*Nationaleinbildungskraft*). Territorial shifts and wanderings, cultural as-

similation, changes in language, and linguistic intermingling – all these events contribute to the disruption of a living flow of substance that nourishes the essential growth of a people, its language, and its culture.

Although a closer look at several of the formative texts of this time, such as Herder's works, often leads to a more differentiated account of the respective notions and implications of the "arborification" of language and nation, it is important to note that the reception of these concepts and their reductive and ideologizing tendencies have been very influential. Considering the enormous influence during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of Idealist and Romantic concepts of an essential connectedness between language and national identity, it is hardly surprising that these ideas continued to dominate articulations of national identity and cultural belonging in exile. For many exiles, clinging to the German language in a situation where it was of no use for coping and communicating meant holding on to a piece of home. In fact, it was often the only form of belonging they could grasp and hold on to. In spite of the difficulties of publishing and distribution, many writers continued to write in German. For most, this was a sheer necessity, as they felt unable to express themselves properly in any other language. But for some, keeping faith with the mother tongue was also seen as an act of resistance against the barbarization of the German language by Nazi jargon. Like Heinrich Mann, who had proclaimed in 1933 that "the duties of the emigrants" were to speak up for a suppressed and expelled "better Germany" (Mann 1971, 16), many anti-fascists were convinced that, by cultivating the German language under extreme conditions, they could contribute to preserving and continuing a cultural heritage that appeared to be highly threatened.

However, attempts to preserve German language and culture as the legitimate continuation of a pure and constant tradition soon faced the problem of how to speak and write in isolation or at best in a community of exiles. Here, one often encounters the notion that language is an organic part of the writer's self that degenerates if it is not in permanent connection with a living, organic linguistic community. The Romantic idea of an original belonging created by a language that must not lose its roots, an idea implying dependence on a certain soil or territory, resounds in Lion Feuchtwanger's lamentations on the "bitter experience of being split off from the living stream of the mother tongue" (Feuchtwanger 1984 [1943], 535). He categorically claims that attempts by fellow writers to adopt a new language for their writing must always remain fruitless and impossible:

Nobody can achieve this. One can certainly learn to express oneself in a foreign language; however, the final emotional nuances of foreign intonation cannot be adopted. Write, create in a foreign language one cannot (Feuchtwanger 1984 [1943] 1984, 436).⁵

Interestingly enough, however, in this same essay, in which Feuchtwanger seemingly reproduces traditional ideas of rootedness in a mother tongue as the necessary precondition of creativity, he questions this very notion. The lamentation of the hardships and crises of a writer is, in fact, only one topic of an essay titled “Der Schriftsteller im Exil,” (“The Working Problems of the Writer in Exile”) first published in 1943. After dwelling on this subject for a while, Feuchtwanger looks back at his own writings in exile and states, “Today I am happy to see that even in those dark times I did not put the stress on how an artist suffers but rather showed how the author, somebody who really deserves this name, grows and gains strength in exile” (Feuchtwanger 1984 [1943], 537). What follows does not altogether contradict or revoke the categorical assertions of the first part, but rather opens up a new perspective in which these statements appear in a different light. Exile, the second part of the essay begins, not only makes the person affected feel “wretched and small, it also hardens the exile and makes him great. In exile, the writer is exposed to a plethora of new material and new ideas that surge at him [...]” (Feuchtwanger 1984 [1943], 537). It cannot be denied, Feuchtwanger goes on to say, that forced contact with a foreign language, which he had just regretted so emphatically, ultimately proves to be an enrichment. When immersed in a foreign language, the author sharpens each word of his native language by comparing and reflecting on the different scope and nuances of words in different tongues. By holding to the assertions about monolingualism and mother tongue, supplemented, however, by his remarks on the enriching experience of learning a foreign language, Feuchtwanger’s view comes close to Derrida’s reflections on monolingualism. Derrida’s book *Monolingualism of the Other: Or, the Prosthesis of Origin* opens with an invitation to the reader to imagine a specific scenario:

[...] imagine someone who would cultivate the French language. What is called the French language. Someone whom the French language would cultivate. And who, as a French citizen, would be, moreover, a subject of French culture, as we say. Now, suppose, that one day this subject of French culture would tell you in good French: “I only have one language; it is not mine” (Derrida 1998, 1).

Loss and lack – the realization that one cannot control or command “one’s” language and that being a speaker of a language does not ensure command of a homogeneous past, of a cartography, or of fixed knowledge – are linked to a specific intellectual movement toward a radicalism in notions of language and identity. However, radicalism here does not mean the assertion of an essential truth in or about language, but rather refers to a process of reading metaphors and discursive patterns centering on “roots” (Lat. *radix*: root) that upsets a powerful tradition of

ontologizing and naturalizing monolingualism. This becomes particularly clear in the autobiographical passages of the book, in which Derrida goes back to his own childhood as a French-speaking Algerian Jew. At an early age, this “French Jewish child from Algeria” – exposed to and part of manifold processes of cultural separation, exclusion, and suppression (one could almost say, from the beginning) – feels the urge to go “down to the root of the root, before the root,” so that he, “in ultra-radicality,” as Derrida puts it, feels and calls himself “more *and* less French but also more and less Jewish than all the French, all the Jews, and all the Jews of France. And here as well, [more Francophone Maghrebian] than all the Francophone Maghrebians” (Derrida 1998, 49). As the text goes on to describe the ossification of Hebrew traditions no longer legible for the Jewish boy, one thinks of Fichte’s description of a language cut off from its roots. Even though Derrida explicitly laments his “handicapped memory” and speaks of his grievances, this does not result in a longing for a cultural identity that can be traced to distinct origins. Instead, the experience of belonging to different cultural strands – which over time and as a result of exile, colonialism, and suppression have intermingled to such an extent that it seems nearly impossible to grasp one’s origins as a single set of roots – gives rise to deconstruction as a mode of life but also as the main contribution that Derrida as a thinker has bestowed on “his” culture, which is neither his nor ours.

Writers in exile, especially many exiled Jewish writers, in several ways foreshadow Derrida’s explorations of monolingualism and root-ness. As shown above, a reading of Feuchtwanger’s essay written in Californian exile illustrates its deconstructive mode of approaching the question of cultural roots. Derrida’s book on monolingualism was first published in 1996. With the rise of the Nazis, German-Jewish writers, it must be remembered, were denied any legitimate home in the German language (on the antisemitic tradition of denying to Jews any participation in a German language community see Gilman 1986). In the “12 Theses against the Un-German Spirit,” issued in April 1933, immediately preceding the book burnings, by the Press and Propaganda Section of the National Socialist German Student Association, it was proclaimed that “language and literature have their roots in the Folk” and that preserving the purity of the German *Volk* could only mean that Jews were no longer allowed to write and publish in German.⁶

Here one can discern a certain tradition of thinking about language as a privileged means of forming and expressing a national unity that now appears to be tantamount to a quest for racial homogeneity. It is therefore hardly surprising that for Jewish authors, who had until then cultivated German as “their” one and only language, being not only expelled from Germany, now controlled by a political foe, but also explicitly shut out from their language and culture came as a shock. Some years after his own expulsion and flight, Peter Weiss describes

this shock in a poignant way. In his essay “Laokoon or On the Limits of Language,” he describes the deep rupture that exile meant for him as a German-speaking writer. In fact, his personal account of exile develops a specific theory of language that has its origin in the experience of this violent rupture, this severance from any embeddedness in a language community and from a “dwelling in a language,” an event which disrupted all sense of belonging. Weiss, who was born into an assimilated family and whose father had converted to Christianity, did not know about his “Jewishness” until the Nazis forced this designation upon him. For him, being expelled from his native language meant being given names that automatically declared him to be a foreign body, a being that could no longer assure itself of its identity by means of a mother tongue and the language it had grown up with:

If he wanted to refer to himself, his words were declared invalid. [...] He is not intact as a speaker anymore. [...] For the others he is no more than a thing. A cabbage. A piece of cinder” (Weiss 1968, 174).

Living in exile not only intensifies the feeling of rejection and expulsion that precedes it but also offers a means of survival – the adoption of the foreign language as a new means of expression: “every finding of a word was to him a discovery, every fixing of a single sentence a territorial gain” (Weiss 1968, 182). This task, however, is described as a difficult and existential struggle accompanied by deep feelings of forsakenness in the initial phase, which also opens up a gap between the old language and the new one. For Peter Weiss, the gap lies between German and Swedish, the latter serving as the language of his writing for many years. Unlike some others, the protagonist of the text (who is always referred to as “he” and never explicitly identified as Weiss, the author of the text) feels that a return to an original, “natural” language is not possible, even if he does decide to speak and write in this language once more. The language now has a strange, foreign sound; “in between the words pronounced and his ears was the memory of a flight” (Weiss 1968, 186). It has lost its privileged status as his own language by constantly making him aware that it is not his, in Derrida’s words. It has become the (m)other tongue, inscribing every reference to identity and home with a sense of estrangement and irreducible difference. Writing in this language means remembering disintegration and helplessness. There is no connection to the roots of its words, which, according to the text, “have become weathered, the words standing separated from their origin.” This separation, however, can also be looked upon as a liberation in the sense that language no longer limits the dwelling of the speaker to a specific place such as a country, a cultural identity, or a nation. Instead, this language, which no longer has “a fixed abode” (Weiss 1986, 187), opens up possibilities of writing and living beyond traditional par-

adigms of identity and concepts of rootedness. “The demands of nations had lost any meaning for him” (Weiss 1986, 186), the text explicitly notes.

In his essay “How Much Home Does a Person Need?,” which was also published in the mid-1960s, Jean Améry comes to a very similar conclusion: after being expelled from one’s mother tongue there can be no return, no new home in the traditional sense of the word (Améry 2009, 41–61). For him, in the realization that what had once been home has now become enemy territory is simultaneously an insight into the fact that this homeland had never been “ours” to begin with. Whom this “we” signifies here is not altogether clear; it could refer to expellees and refugees in general or specifically to Jewish exiles. That it makes possible several associations is intentional, I would argue; the text thus refuses to fall back into a logic of identity that it shows to be violent and exclusive. However, the text also takes a very clear stand on the tendency to attribute to the writer in exile the responsibility of upholding a “true” and pure tradition of German language and culture, of which he or she can claim to be a representative. The argument made in these texts by Améry and Weiss is still more radical in that the experience of exile here leads to a fundamental skepticism toward nationalist rhetoric that claims that communities and languages are or can be “naturally” rooted. Rejecting any thought of national representation and prestige, these writings show that national belonging was never an original state of being but was rather an imaginary construction that disavowed the toleration of any difference from the beginning. As Homi K. Bhabha put it, “The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor” (Bhabha 1994, 291).

A number of German-Jewish voices were already expressing similar insights in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For example, in his essay, Franz Werfel demands a “sacrificium nationis” and conceives of the refugee – someone who “comes from elsewhere, has gone through hardship and death and survived the ordeals of exile” (Werfel 1992, 66) – as a paradigmatic figure of a non-nationalist community. One of the most outspoken critics of the nation-state paradigm was Joseph Roth, who asserts as early as 1927, in his long essay “The Wandering Jews” (“Juden auf Wanderschaft”), that striving for a national “fatherland” through assimilation or Zionism betrays the specific Jewish experience and Jewish history. Any consolation in the millennia of misery that the Jews had endured lay in the fact that they did not have a national fatherland. In an article written in 1934 during his Parisian exile, Roth criticizes as a dangerous delusion the attempt of many German Jews “to make themselves and the world believe [...] that there is a ‘better Germany.’” The Jews were instead to remember their cosmopolitan, transnational traditions. In view of the antisemitic propaganda attacking Jews as “cosmopolites without roots” (a phrase favored by Goebbels), Roth asks:

What shame is there in not belonging to a nation? [...] Is it not more honorable to be a human being than a German, a Frenchman, an Englishman? To stand between the races seems more pleasurable than being rooted in any one of them [...]. Man is not a tree (Roth 1989, 532).

And he continues:

It is a stupid German habit to degrade their heroes by comparing them to oaks. Man is precisely not an oak. The oak is captive and man is free. [...] Legs and feet God has given to man so that he wanders over the earth which is his. Wandering is not a curse but a blessing (Roth 1989, 532).

This opposition can already be found in Feuchtwanger's "Psalm of the World Citizen," a poem at the core of the first volume of his Josephus trilogy, published in 1932 as *The Jewish War*. The "Psalm" reads as follows:

I have given man shanks to carry him over the earth,
 And legs to run,
 That he does not stop moving like a tree in its roots.
 For a tree has only *one* nourishment
 But man feeds himself on everything
 I have created under the sky.
 A tree always knows the same things,
 But man has eyes, so that he imbibes what is foreign
 (Feuchtwanger 1960, 276).

The media theoretician Vilém Flusser rejects in a very similar fashion the use of root metaphor to signify human belonging and origin. Flusser, who was born into the German-Jewish community in Prague and fled to Brazil in 1939, says of himself that he knows "the sufferings which are part of every exile." In his essay collection *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* (published posthumously in 1994), as in his autobiography, he stresses the challenging but also liberating possibilities open to an exile. In the insight that "man is not a tree. And that perhaps human dignity lies in his not having roots" (Flusser 2000, 107; see also Ernst 2006.), Flusser – like Roth and Feuchtwanger – sees the precondition for an understanding of exile as more than a mere state of bereavement and loss. He calls for an understanding of the self which, by remembering exile as its origin, cannot be subsumed under the defining power of nationalism.⁷

While Roth and Feuchtwanger – in their assertions of the transnational character of Jewishness, of the Jews as a "people of the book" rather than a people "rooted" in a specific soil or territory – write in op-

position to assimilation and commitment to a national cause in exile, at the same time they take a sympathetic position toward Zionism. "I am far from being an opponent of the Zionist idea," Roth writes in 1934. He acknowledges that under the present circumstances it is a necessity; however, he sees it as a tragic necessity because it means reducing to just another national fatherland (*Scholle*, "clod; native soil") a people that has brought cosmopolitan ideas and modes of life into the world (Roth 1989b, 546). Similarly, Feuchtwanger speaks sympathetically of Zionist attempts to revive Hebrew as a Jewish national language. Although he himself confesses to being tied to his German mother tongue, he also sees the future of language not in distinct national languages existing side by side but rather in an ever-increasing intermingling and the eventual development of a world language (Feuchtwanger 1984, 474). In 1933, his view that the nomad who had developed as an outcome of the Jewish diaspora was more suited to the demands of the day (such as modernity, globalization, growing nationalism) than the farmer rooted in his clod (Feuchtwanger 1984, 484) can be read as a protest against antisemitic propaganda but also against a traditional notion within German Jewry that Jewish speakers of the German language are essentially connected with a German "motherland," an argument that was obviously part of assimilationist rhetoric (Kremer 2007, 201). Furthermore, Feuchtwanger and Roth's opposition to a notion of roots – with its interweaving of *Volkskultur*, language, territory, and state – is also clearly directed against the Zionist thought of the time.

Even if one contends that a nuanced account of the rhetoric in different strands and positions of Zionism reveals different ways of adopting and transforming the idea of cultural rootedness, there was certainly a distinct tendency among German-speaking Zionists to transfer to Zionist discourse the German tradition of thinking about the nation state as something that developed from a common language. This can be seen in the evolution of the Jews' demands for a national state and a language of their own (Kremer 2007, 288–401). Sometimes, as in the case of Robert Weltsch, who explicitly cites Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, there are references to the close connectedness of vernacular and nation. Buber calls the Jewish Renaissance a return to the emotional traditions rooted in Judaism (Buber 1916, 11) and, with his discussion of the importance of rootedness for any creative activity, the Palestinian homeland that promises the "power of the motherly soil" also comes into play. Whereas for Buber the Jewish *Luftmensch* has lost his roots by turning to a solely intellectual and therefore lifeless study of books, Heinrich Loewe finds even more expressive images in *The Languages of the Jews* (1911): life in *galut*, he states, has meant that the natural roots, the Jewish rootedness in the Hebrew language and in the soil of origin – they are seen as two sides of the same coin – have been cut off. The remaining energy and productivity has resulted in the creation of "ae-

rial roots" (*Luftwurzeln*) that cling to any soil they can reach until they are cut off again. Aerial roots can thus be only a poor and insufficient substitute. All this time, for two thousand years, the Jewish nation (*Volk*) and its national language (*Volkssprache*) have not ceased in their quest to find the motherly soil from which they have been torn and in which they place all hope of regaining their youthful strength (Loewe 1911, 21, 88).

Interestingly, the metaphor of the "aerial root" reappears in a note published by Arnold Zweig in his German-language journal, *Orient*, in which he attempts to defend German-Jewish intellectual life in Palestine (Zweig 1942). Having fled first to Prague and then via Switzerland to Sanary-sur-Mer, Zweig went to Palestine in pursuit of his Zionist convictions. There, however, he was confronted with the nationalist monolingual endeavor, which meant that those trying to impose Hebrew as the language of a new national state did not accept publications in German. In this article, Zweig defends himself against allegations that he is not sufficiently "rooted" in his new country – that he remains an exile (from German culture and soil), so to speak, instead of recognizing that *aliyah* means to end *galut* and the contradictions and hybridizations characteristic of the diaspora. Zweig questions the idea that living in Eretz Yisrael as a Jew automatically ensures that he can put down roots there. Claims about the "natural" appeal of the seemingly original land are exposed as ideological insofar as they neglect questions of economic survival. While Palestinian soil has not proved to be fertile for his productivity, he concludes, he has grown "aerial roots" that extend toward different countries, languages, and people and enable him to subsist. This description is remarkable, as it subverts the opposition of roots and aerial roots, essence and supplement, home and exile. Aerial roots are not linked to a solid territory or an immovable tradition. Instead, they establish manifold connections and communicative networks that undermine the idea of a homogenous, stable identity or a language of self-preservation. Thus, aerial roots tend to bring the (m)other tongue to the fore if existence in a certain place necessarily depends on having one's living and moving roots elsewhere. Zweig's brief text can thus be read in connection with the deliberations on language and rootedness found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book on the rhizome, in which this figure is contrasted with the paradigm of the tree and its roots. For these authors, the tree always implies a logic of representation, genealogy, and hierarchy. Against models of community and state, which, by drawing on the root metaphor, suggest the existence of pure origins and a natural law of development, they posit rhizomatic structures with a multiplicity of connection points and directions of growth.

We must not believe in trees anymore, in bigger or smaller roots, we have suffered enough from them. The whole culture of trees has

been constructed on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 26).

Aerial roots are at the fore of these phenomena, according to Deleuze and Guattari, as they permeate the distinction between the tree and the rhizome paradigm (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 33).⁸ With respect to language, rhizomatic structures subvert the notion of a mother tongue: “There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 13). This description applies in an especially acute sense to the context of Eretz Yisrael in the 1930s and 1940s to which Zweig’s article on “rootedness” refers.

A poem by Hans Keilson serves as a final example of how notions of rootedness as a precondition for language, especially poetic language, are questioned and transformed in the wake of an experience of exile. Like Domin’s “Passing Landscape” and the essays by Weiss and Améry discussed above, the poem was written well after 1945 and deals with an ongoing state of exile. Thereby it also hints at possibilities of thinking of (poetic) language as a means of bearing witness to rootlessness rather than in terms of roots and organic growth. Keilson, a German-Jewish psychoanalyst and writer, fled to Holland, where he lived until his death in 2011. His poem “Sprachwurzellos,” which later gave its name to a collection of poems, was first published in *DIE ZEIT* in 1963.

Sprachwurzellos

um die geheimnisse	for the secrets
des konjunktivs	of the subjunctive
– die zeit der bunten bälle –	– the time of colorful balls –
mühte ich mich	I exerted myself
vergebens	in vain
an den grachten	at the canals
die neuen freunde grüßend	greeting the new friends
und sie nennen mich mijnheer	and they call me mijnheer
unter den windseiten	beneath the windward side
der brücken	of the bridges
– es war eine hohe flut –	– the tide was high –
beim grünspan der türme	by the green rust of the towers
im keller das volk der asseln	in the basement the woodlouse
zerbrach die goldene grammatik	people
barbara schrie	smashed the golden grammar
	barbara cried

dames en herren –	dames en herren –
also lerne ich ihre sprache	so I learn their language
der himmel darüber	the sky above
hutspot und bols	hutspot and bols
wurzellos	rootless
ein pfad im gekröse	a path in the viscera
der zeltlager	of the tent camp
und weiß mich gedemütigt	and know myself humiliated
in der wollust	in the lust for
verdorrter schriftzeichen	mummified letters

A crisis of language here is connected with a place of exile: at the canals (possibly those of Amsterdam), the poetic voice struggles with the secrets of the subjunctive mode, with nuances of expression, that is, by going beyond the pragmatic mode of signifying everyday things. The “time of colorful balls” can consequently be read as referring to a time of childhood, in which a playful, creative use of language that later also characterizes dreams and poetic productivity is still possible. The poem integrates Dutch words and thus exposes linguistic processes of code-switching and idiom-mingling, which have also been called “Emigranto” with regard to exile (Deutschkron 2001). But not only are words such as “mijnheer” integrated into the poem, the German-speaking voice is also renamed in a way, made part of a foreign sphere, and thus separated from itself. The second stanza seemingly evokes the catastrophic events of persecution by the Nazis (who establish new house rules, according to which the “woodlouse people” live in the basement – presumably a suggestion of the performative power of language to cast (a) people out of the human realm). In this context the “golden grammar” is broken and “Barbara cried.” Barbara is a Christian martyr who is remembered as the patron of the persecuted. The word Barbara also means “stranger,” thus hinting at the sufferings of those who have been labeled “others,” the refugees and those who have been killed. On a more mundane level, Barbara was also Keilson’s infant daughter, born in 1941, shortly after he had gone into hiding, having been forced to leave his pregnant wife behind. “Golden grammar” seems to refer to a cherished language of singular meaning for the speaker and can thus possibly be seen as the notion of a mother tongue. The third and final stanza starts with another address in Dutch, this time uttered by the poetic voice in a gesture of becoming part of a new community of speech.

Here, learning the foreign language, just as in the account Peter Weiss gives of his learning Swedish (if one reads his “Laokoon” speech autobiographically), appears as an act of survival, not as an act of substitution. “Hutspot and bols” signify typical (national) food and drink that represent feeding oneself under the conditions of exile, but they also

hint at how the refugee is restricted to everyday conversation and thus deprived of the possibility to express him- or herself with direct access to the unlimited richness of meaningful words. "Rootless," the speaker cuts his way through the tents of a camp, evoking refugees without a permanent home as well as the tents of Jacob and the nomadic traces in Jewish life. Thus at the end there is a feeling not just of humiliation but also of lust, which refers both to the withered letters in the final verse and to the voice that longs for them. It also hints at the discovery of a new creative potential that lies in dealing with a deracinated language. In its discovery of "the word of exile" (Di Cesare 2012, 117), the poem's proximity to the final passage of Peter Weiss's "Laokoon" speech is most obvious.

While there is a tendency in exile literature, as well as in Zionist literature, with which there are personal and structural contiguities, to revive a rhetoric of (national) belonging and representation that draws affirmatively on the root metaphor, in a number of texts this metaphorical operation as such is explored, transposed, and undermined. Keilson's poem demonstrates a poetic mode of remembrance that evades nostalgia and any rhetoric of retrieving or reviving one's roots. By exposing a manifold identity and memory that is not whole but is rather split by events that violently terminate genealogies, poems like this reflect on the way in which they themselves have sprung from an experience of violence and expulsion rather than from rootedness in a single language or culture.

Endnotes

- 1 In this German edition, the English version of the poem is presented on the left-hand page, the German on the right. First published in English in Pollak 1988.
- 2 Stanley first wrote and published her autobiography in English and later (1964) in German. She described the German version as a translation by the author.
- 3 In their analysis of the “Israel Corpus,” a series of interviews conducted by Anne Betten with German-speaking Jewish immigrants to Palestine in the 1930s, Eva-Maria Thüne and Simona Leonardi found that when cultural descent and belonging were discussed, the root metaphor was omnipresent. In some cases, it was used strategically to contradict the claim of the National Socialists that Jews could not be rooted in German culture (Thüne and Leonardi 2011).
- 4 In the same year as Domin’s poem, Paul Celan published a volume of poetry containing the poem “Ich hörte sagen” (I heard it said), in which the speaker sees “my poplar go down to the water [...] I saw its roots pleading skywards for night” (Ich sah meine Pappel hinabgehen zum Wasser, [...] ich sah ihre Wurzeln gen Himmel um Nacht flehen) – an image of a moving tree (poplar/people), which in some ways corresponds to Domin’s migrant landscape. For a close reading see the perceptive essay by Vivian Liska (2003).
- 5 Translations are, if not otherwise indicated, mine. I thank Lydia White and Kathleen Luft for proofreading the English text.
- 6 See theses 5 and 7: “A Jew can only think Jewish. If he writes in German, he is lying.” “Therefore, we demand of the censor: Jewish writings are to be published in Hebrew. If they appear in German, they must be identified as translations.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Theses).
- 7 This implies not only the deconstruction of the seemingly natural ties between one’s (national) land and language, but also the idea that in exile the mother tongue remains one’s only possession or home. In reference to Lévinas, Donatella Di Cesare observes, “This is another way of saying that no language, not even the mother tongue [...] is the originary and irreplaceable site of meaning. This is another way of breaking with the idolatrous sacralization of the root, of the motherland as the mother tongue [...]” (Di Cesare 2012, 107).
- 8 Interestingly, the metaphor of the aerial root is currently reappearing in descriptions of what can be called contemporary exile literature. Sujet-Verlag, a Bremen-based publishing house founded by the former Iranian exile Madjid Mohid, uses this image prominently to mark its specialization in German-speaking literature written by migrants and exiles (www.sujet-verlag.de).

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