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## About exile in a new reception grid

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### Abstract

The paper approaches from a critical perspective a controversial study, *Patria de hârtie/ The Paper Country*, on the phenomenon of exile and on its reflection in the writing of three categories of exiles – ExPatriots, Expatriates and Ex-patriots, identifying textual markers of the symbolic position in regards to the imaginary country of origin and that of adoption. The project – innovative and meritorious in itself – raises, however, a series of questions regarding analysis perspectives – with an emotionally charged metalanguage as well as with positive/ negative reception choices that pre-determine the research and which are, as much as the strong points of the study, the object of this paper.

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*Keywords:* Exile, writing, ExPatriots, Expatriates, Ex-patriots;

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### Introduction

With a controversial premise and an explicit polemic attitude which is debatable, Nicoleta Sălcudeanu's study, *Patria de hârtie/ The Paper Country* (Sălcudeanu, 2003), was not as well received by the critics as it might have deserved. Brave even when she challenges classicized views on exile as phenomenon and Romanian literary exile, or when she analyses texts by authors who, they themselves, started controversies, the author supports her perspective with argued vehemently and with analytical passion amplified by an explicit taste for polemic.

In Simona Vasilache's opinion, "prima parte a studiului încearcă, fără pretenția de a epuiza subiectul, să dea contur surghiunului literar, ce are în spate umbra călătorului hăituit de himere și, deseori, durerea unui «divorț» moral de ceea ce a fost odată «patria». Este, atât cât i-o permite spațiul, o mică enciclopedie a stărilor, nu o dată contradictorii, mai totdeauna resimțite «pe coarda thanatică», pe care le provoacă înstrăinarea. Melancolia, analizată de Starobinski, și acea veritabilă boală, *nostos-algos*, descoperită de medicul Hofer în secolul XVII, sunt constante ale treptelor diferite din ceea ce Nicoleta Sălcudeanu numește «exilul istoric»". [the first part of the study tries, without pretending to exhaust the topic, to delineate literary banishment, which is haunted by the shadow of the traveller chased by chimeras and, often, by the pain of a moral 'divorce' from what was once the 'homeland'. It is,

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as much as space allows it, a small encyclopaedia of states of mind, more than once contradictory, almost always felt ‘in a thanatic vein’, and resulting from estrangement. The melancholy, analysed by Starobinski, and that true ailment, *nostos-algos*, discovered by the medical doctor Hofer in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, are constants of the different stages in what Nicoleta Sălcudeanu calls ‘historical exile’.] (Vasilache, 2004)

Moreover, the endeavour seems worthy to her, since “a privi exilul românesc ca pe o “arcă a lui Noe“, ce seamănă bine cu cea din țară, pe care s-au salvat scrierile (cît mai) verticale moral și valoroase estetic, este, dincolo de idealizarea inevitabilă, o ipoteză corectă, și astfel se justifică, probabil, analogia doricului, ionicului și corinticului românesc, pe care o face Nicoleta Sălcudeanu cu cele trei tipologii ale „înstrăinaților“ pe care le propune: expatrioții, expatriații și, fără a exemplifica, în cazul lor, ex-patrioții, un teritoriu încă necolonizat.” [to regard Romanian exile like a “Noah’s ark”, which resembles closely the one in the country, where the (most) morally vertical and aesthetically valuable writings were saved, is, beyond the inevitable idealization, a correct hypothesis, and it, thus, probably justifies the analogy of the Romanian Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, made by Nicoleta Sălcudeanu with the three typologies of the “estranged” that she proposes: expatriots, expatriates and, without exemplifying in their case, ex-patriots, a yet un-colonized territory.] (Vasilache, 2004)

Responding mostly to the vulnerable aspects of architecture and metalanguage, Alex Goldiș is categorical and he drastically criticizes the author’s work: “singura ei carte de construcție, *Patria de hârtie* (2003), reflectă un aliaj straniu, semănând mai degrabă a conflict, între o pășărească teoretică și un limbaj publicistic suprasaturat de plasticitate. Astfel încât darea de seamă asupra criticii de azi tot din fragmente publicistice se încheagă.” [her only book of construction, *The Paper Country* (2003), reveals a strange alloy, resembling rather a conflict, between theoretical gibberish and a journalese oversaturated by plasticity. Thus, the report on the contemporary criticism is also composed by journalistic fragments.] (Goldiș, 2012) And, furthermore, – “critica ei e un adevărat recital de excentricitate. Nicoleta Sălcudeanu se ferește de bunul-simț într-atât, încât sacrifică aproape total valorile învecinate cu el: echilibrul, obiectivitatea, adecvarea, ba chiar justa valorizare.” [her critique is a veritable recital of eccentricity. Nicoleta Sălcudeanu avoids common sense to such an extent, that she sacrifices almost all values akin to it: balance, objectivity, adequacy, even correct evaluation.] (Goldiș, 2012)

### **The paper country or on the adventure of exile as writing**

An already established formula with Romanian specialized research work on exile, the *paper country* is the title of a volume where the author, Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, submits her own taxonomy meant to include, define and exemplify the writing instantiations of the exiles and of exile in the novels, memoirs, journals of important members of today’s Romanian diaspora.

Always willing to (re)write a possible alternative history – that of the exilic space of Romanian origin – Nicoleta Sălcudeanu engages in a free polemic, she attacks without hesitation, or, occasionally, she finds small mitigating circumstances for some exiles who, either permanently settled in their adopting country, or oscillating between the origin and the second degree space, are equally suspended between the two ideal(ized) representations of imaginary homelands.

It is the case of the novelists Vintilă Horia, Dumitru Țepeneag, or of the theoretician and literary critic Sorin Alexandrescu, living in Amsterdam. It is mainly the case of the latter, author of a volume of studies with an identity-retrieving and homogenizing function on what should be named the Romanian cultural model. The author considers the cultural re-writing proposed by Sorin Alexandrescu meritorious in itself, but susceptible to an unacceptable *parti-pris* and, on the whole, inadequate for the present moment as well as frail in point of argumentation: “de aceea nedumerește volumul lui Sorin Alexandrescu (*Privind înapoi, modernitatea*), ce se obținează în a reconstrui pe nisip edificiul unei altfel de modernități românești, sprijinită pe coloane improprii, fapt ce compromite suplețea zidăriei speculative: Eliade și Cioran, ayatollahi culturali, modernizați cu prețul împingerii conceptualității cât de cât canonice în suburbia indistinctului, în vagul cel mai pernicios.” [for this reason, Sorin Alexandrescu’s volume (*Looking back, modernity*) puzzles, since it is obstinately set on reconstructing in the sand the edifice of another Romanian modernity, supported by inadequate columns, which compromises the gracefulness of the speculative masonry: Eliade and Cioran, cultural ayatollahs, modernized at the price of pushing the slightest canonical conceptualism towards the suburbs of the undistinctive, towards the most pernicious vagueness.] (Sălcudeanu, 2003, pp. 23)

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