

Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea

edited by Mike Brown & Barbara Humberstone, Ashgate, Farnham, England, 2015, 200 pp., hardcover \$119.95 (ISBN 978-1472424334)

A photograph of a young Syrian boy's drowned body being recovered from the surf by a Turkish police officer in September 2015 has drawn the horrified gaze of Europe and beyond. Three-year old Aylan Kurdi, along with his brother and mother, are a few of the many thousands who have lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean. Cross cutting scales from the global to the body, this image symbolizes a terrible and poignant embodiment of the geopolitical tragedy created by proxy wars across one regional landscape and continent-wide government neglect and overt xenophobia across another, producing such horrors at sea.

The tragic ongoing crisis demonstrates both the substantial political and corporeal volatility of this seascape, challenging common tropes surrounding ocean space as an unpeopled and apolitical void. Of course, these land biased conceptions have never resonated for those who ride the waves, submerge their bodies, or traverse the sea surface for recreation, service, subsistence, livelihood, transportation, migration or asylum. In this edited volume of essays, a seascape "is not simply a fearful chaotic place, a blank slate, or sublime nature", rather the contributors "attempt to move beyond simplistic descriptions to capture the complexities and nuances of being a person in and of the sea" (Brown & Humberstone, p. 24).

Employing actor-centered perspectives, the authors seek to center the sea by "writing *from within* a seascape" (p. 14), utilizing a juxtaposition of reflexive autoethnographic narratives anchored by diverse theoretical apparatuses including habitus, desires and flows, assemblages, new materialism, affect, place-based, and more-than-human geographies. This allows for a deep political engagement with identity, gender, race, indigeneity, nationality and the "power relations on the water and who has access to waves," as considered in Mihi Nemani's chapter, "Being a Brown Bodyboarder" (p. 85). The focus of these embodied narratives and fluid geographies are heavily weighted towards sailing and surfing pursuits, but there is also consideration of surf patrol helicopter rescue, European emigration, and animal encounters.

These contributions to thinking and writing *with* the sea are important steps in politicizing ocean spaces beyond the traditional geopolitical and global scales of national boundary making, resources, shipping, and the hedging of naval powers. Evoking bodies and identities within and through ocean space and seascapes can provide a powerful political intersection for further exploration. While this collection is restricted by its concentration on leisure and sport, it draws attention to the multitude of stories to be told and heard of bodies and seascapes. Looking forward from this work, there is potential in envisioning the politics of seascapes through a politics of the body, at the very least to humanize those struggling with sea migration, rising sea levels, and sustenance fishing in an overfished ocean.

Transcending any allusions of "[t]he 'featureless sea' or 'void space' [in] particular readings or interpretations of the sea" (p. 14) to consider how bodies contend with, or succumb to, material incompatibilities with ocean physicality cements oceans as places, cultures, and relationalities. In Robbie Nicols' chapter, "In the Name of the Whale," he asserts, "[i]t is the complete and utter

directness of experiences such as these that may just provide the inspiration for people to do something...[s]uch experiences have powerful emotional rawness that are direct and compelling and can be harnessed as moral impulses” (p. 151). While this chapter is specifically referencing sustainable environmental practices, it could be assessed more broadly to harness other political moments through direct embodied experiences but also academic communication via autoethnographic narratives. Moving forward in Oceanic Studies, there is much to be taken from this book’s interdisciplinary undertaking that can expand critical and radical political geographies of seascapes by harnessing the power of corporeal interconnectivity and relationality with the salty majority of our planet.

Katherine G. Sammler
California State University Maritime Academy