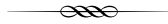# Introduction

Transience and the Sea

Martin Demant Frederiksen and Tamta Khalvashi

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Sensing the Sea

One of the many things fascinating about the Black Sea is its name, as it seems to bear a deceptive designation. There are times, surely, where its dark tones justify calling it black. But it never consistently wears this colour. Sometimes it is deep blue, at other times it is bright turquoise. Sometimes it even appears white, either through the breaking of massive waves or from strong sunlight shimmering on its still surface. And it is given additional colours in the shape of red sunburned faces, shimmering yellow city lights, white sailboats, blue and grey stones, and reflections of green slopes, each temporarily colouring the sea anything but black. Yet that which colours the sea often only does so temporarily. The shimmering lights fade by dawn, the green slopes wither in winter, the blue stones are covered by the tide, and the red sunburned faces disappear as the tourist season ends.

The name derives, however, not from its appearance but from its location. Most likely, it was as a representation of a cardinal point from a time when south was red, west was white, east was light blue and north was black. It may have been the Achaemenids, the First Persian Empire, who established these colour points. A multitude of groups and empires for whom the sea was not a north, but a south, a west or an east, have since moved across, settled along or sought to conquer these coasts, but the sea retained its name. It is a sea that has been a recurrent, yet always

fleeting place of meeting of diverse histories, landscapes, aesthetics and worldviews. If anything, this is a Sea of Transience, and not just through its colour and history, but also through its depth. Below the topmost 150–200 metres, the Black Sea is largely devoid of oxygen. Ninety per cent of the Black Sea's waters are thus fit only for the hardiest micro-organisms and the preservation of shipwrecks. Life in the Black Sea is transient as you go deeper and it is the most isolated segment of the world's oceans.

As John Mack notes in his cultural history of the sea, each sea has its hinterlands and its waters that flow to it from inland rivers. This goes for all of the six seas he mentions: the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Pacific and the Mediterranean. Yet surprisingly, the Black Sea is treated merely as an outflow to the latter (Mack 2011: 40). In contrast to its multiple inflows, the Black Sea's only outlets are the narrow Turkish Straits, leading to the Marmara and then the Mediterranean. Through such a perception, the Black Sea becomes not just a hinterland but a 'hintersea' that speaks to the Mediterranean and not to itself. As such, the Black Sea has not only been marginal in studies of seas and oceans in terms of receiving little attention, it has also been marginal in the sense that when it is mentioned this is done with reference to a core or centre that lies elsewhere.

This volume seeks to remedy this by bringing together anthropological case studies, ethnographic vignettes, photo essays and poems that stay on or at the Black Sea. And in doing so, it explores the potential power that transience as an ontological trait of the sea can offer to political, cultural and aesthetic understandings of the Black Sea. Transience helps to mobilize bodies, ideas, sensations and things through specific time and space that anchors the Black Sea as ever-shifting matter. To attune to the movement, rhythm, depth and colour of the Black Sea, then, means to learn to move in response to its transient characteristics. Yet one of the many curious aspects of transience on the Black Sea is its intertwine-ment with intransience. In fact, as Caroline Humphrey argues in this volume, the Black Sea is characterized by the co-presence of different timescales that are nevertheless interconnected. This means that many transient aspects of the Black Sea leave traces or take new configurations and, paradoxically, sometimes outlive their life expectancy. By departing from this specific nature of transience, we wish to underline that while the Black Sea gives rise to temporary, precarious and fleeting states, move-ments and encounters, these impermanent aspects become constitutive of its politics, poetics and aesthetics. Such transience may come in various forms and guises, from de facto states, tourism, migration, humanitarian aid, trafficking or military troops, and each in their way they impose inequalities that both produce material and social traffic, and generate

pages that follow, this is personified in the shape of sailors' wives, stone collectors, refugees, sex workers, tourists, political activists, tourist boat workers, fishermen and even dolphins. Hence, although all seas are undeniably transient in their own ways, what makes the Black Sea specifically transient is that it leaves something in its wake. As such, the transience of the Black Sea forms several durations at once, resembling an ebb or flow of the sea itself.

In the remainder of this Introduction we begin by asking what it means to study a sea anthropologically and move on to ask what it means to study *this* sea in particular. This leads us to unfold the notion of transience through the kind of experimental anthropology that is applied. In their book *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean argue that experimental anthropology is 'a way of lending greater nuance and sensitivity to the project of ethnographic understanding, and thus of entering more profoundly into the lives and worlds of others' (2017: 8). Indeed, scholarly books have always been shadowed by experimental writing inspired by literary works, including Claude Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, and within recent decades this has become an explicit practice in many anthropological works (e.g. Benson 1993; Archetti 1994; Schwab 2012; McLean 2017). We thus engage with poetry, photo essays, short stories and traditional articles as experiments in ethnographic practice in order to bring forth the world of the transience of the Black Sea in vivid forms. Anthropology shares with other expressive art genres a capacity to take us in and out of other worlds, to allow our stories to travel and sail. The book thus itself repeats an idea of the transience of the sea through its genres, coming and going as tides through diverse moods and modes. This then leads us to unfold the notion of transience and outline the themes that emerge across the individual contributions of the book. And in combination, they show how the ebb and flow of everyday life, as it unfolds on or along the sea, leaves, reveals and erases traces in much the same way as the ebb and flow of history. It may be traces of the latter that we more easily see, but as we hope to show, the former are no less significant. Transient as they may be.

Imagining the Sea

This book arrives as a wave in what Mike Brown and Kimberley Peters have termed the 'oceanic turn' in the social sciences (Brown and Peters 2019). As noted by Markus Balkenhol and Michiel Swinkels, although several classical anthropological studies have engaged with the sea, such as Marshall Sahlin's *Islands of History* and Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts*

of the Western Pacific, anthropology has largely been 'terracentric' (Balkenhol and Swinkels 2015: 7). This has changed, however, and recent research in anthropology focuses not only on ethnographies of 'waterworlds' that explore social life as configured by water (Hastrup and Hastrup 2017), but also on how material entities, such as sea, seawater and oceans, have been shaped and reshaped by rhetorics of gender, race and class (Helmreich 2011), as well as by 'terraqueous solidarities' (Kosmatopoulos 2019), and on how anthropology itself may be seen as a sea voyage (Schneider 2015). Novel studies of life at sea and of the economies and infrastructures of ports have also emerged in an attempt to 'unmoor' anthropology, in the words of Johanna Markkula (2018, see also Markkula and Leivestad 2021; Mannov 2021; Schober 2021), and seas, rivers and coastlines have increasingly become a vantage point from which to consider social lives, politics and the environment anthropologically (see Gilroy 1993; Raffles 2004; Ogden 2011; Carse 2014; Dewan 2021 as examples). Moreover, seawater has operated as a 'theory machine' in anthropology for generating insights about globalization through metaphors of 'flows', 'currents' and 'circulations'. Yet these terms have often masked the fact that the fluidity of such movement is often a rhetorical and metaphorical effect of how we think about mobility (Baumann 1996), mainly through or on land.

Although there is a wave of interest in studying seas and oceans from various disciplinary perspectives, the Black Sea has not been in strong focus until now. Notable exceptions include historical accounts of the Black Sea region as a whole, a place of stable cultural and political identities and connections (e.g. Ascherton 1996; King 2005). Human geographers have looked at the expansion of logistics and infrastructure into the Black Sea, or how states and corporations encroach in the region through logistical geopolitics, such as pipelines, railways or port infrastructures (Barry 2013; Gambino 2018). Anthropological studies have largely focused on borders and boundaries, rather than on flows that partake in and generate these boundaries (Pelkmans 2006; Beller-Hann and Hann 2001). More recent anthropological studies, furthermore, looked at the Black Sea from the perspective of 'currents' and 'co-existence' (Humphrey and Svirskaja 2014; Richardson 2008), while Martin Demant Frederiksen invoked the Black Sea as a site of hope and confinement (Frederiksen 2014). Another strain has focused on the role of tourism in the region (Bethmann 2013; Frederiksen 2013; Ghodsee 2005) or the role of port cities (Bothfeld 2008; Wildner 2008) and natural resources (Knudsen 2009; Scaramelli 2021). This edited volume will build upon these existing studies, but also go beyond them by focusing on the concept of transience to underline the fleeing bodies, materialities and affects that are part and parcel of floating on and inhabiting the Black Sea.

As noted, there has been a tendency to imagine and think about the Black Sea based on external perspectives on it. These perspectives have their roots in images dating back to Persian, Roman and Greek travellers, providing only a one-way imaginary of the Black Sea, but rarely one *from* the Black Sea. Even the current name of the sea is a result of the external imaginary of the first century BC Greeks, who named it Pontos Axeinos or the Inhospitable Sea, which itself is a rendering of the Iranian word Axšaina, meaning dark-coloured. As Greek colonization of Black Sea coasts spread further, the sea began to be called Pont Euxenius or Hospitable Sea. These epistemologies of the Black Sea have left their imprints on local imaginaries and perceptions of the Black Sea. Some authors have theorized the Black Sea along the lines of thalasophobia or a fear of the sea, the Black Sea as a border or Black Sea people as a more terrestrial than sea-oriented semantic entity (Andronikashvili 2012; Kiknadze 2010). In all these descriptions and definitions, we see that even the imaginations of and about the sea are starkly elusive and transient, and they often stem from terracentric and external views about the sea.

There has also been a predisposition of cultural studies of the Black Sea to connect identity with territory that has been land-based, and even then, it has rarely been as a collective land-based region. In his history of the Black Sea, Charles King notes how regions such as the Mediterranean are so well known that they can serve as modifiers – 'Mediterranean cuisines' for instance conjure up or evoke very immediate images (King 2005: 3). This happens less so for the Black Sea, 'a body of water familiar to few people outside the region itself' (ibid.: 4). The discipline of anthropology has largely turned away from a previous focus on area studies or cultural areas that tended to locate particular themes within, for instance, colonial forms of regionalism or genealogies of colonial othering (Guyer 2004). Writing on the Mediterranean, Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot and Silverstein note how this took the shape of Anglo-Saxon depictions of the Mediterranean region that focused on themes such as honour, patronage and hospitality (2020: 2). Increased analytical attention to globalization and flows dissolved such relatively bounded studies yet, as Ben-Yehoyada et al. point out, even today such 'older cultural categories continue to provide analytical purchase on – and an emic vocabulary for making sense of – processes of displacement, economic precarity and political instability' (ibid.: 3).

Again, the Black Sea differs from the Mediterranean in that there has never really been a Black Sea anthropology in the shape of a 'cultural area'. Charles King traces this lack of a coherent imaginary to the fractured or divided lenses through which the region has been seen in recent history, both in academic works and novels, where it has most often been divided

into realms that connect either to the Balkans, to Russian imperial history, to the Caucasus, or to the formation of modern Turkey. Again, different coastal hinterlands have been directing the gaze. In his book, King depicts how 'an array of human connections across a body of water rose and fell and rose again in tandem with changes in the political, economic, and strategic environment of Europe and Eurasia' (2005: 4), and he masterfully traces these developments from 700 BC to the 1990s. Aside from being anthropological in scope, the present volume takes over where King's book stops and adds a more recent chapter to the history of the Black Sea. Our contribution speaks to the fluid addition to coastal and maritime studies. We understand the knowledge, sensibility and experience of the Black Sea as constantly moving and transient to challenge dominant theoretical narratives that strive to determine a Black Sea identity.

Transience and the Black Sea

As a spatial entity, we examine the Black Sea not merely as a topography but just as much as a topology. That is, we focus not only on its surface shapes and features but equally on connectedness and rupture (Knight 2019: 35). In doing so, we follow Nicolas Argenti in coupling topology with a temporal aspect. As he has argued, 'just as the shift to topology in the sciences allowed for the study of space not as fixed but in movement and distortion, so too new socio-cultural models of time might allow us to account more fully for cultural modes and experiences of the non-linear flow of time, its doubling back and enfolding in eddies and whirlpools' (Argenti 2019a: 15, see also Kracauer 1969 and Frederiksen, this volume). In *Remembering Absence*, Argenti engages with this principle by describing the Aegean Sea through a particular temporality. Drawing together different (hi)stories, he shows how life on the Greek Islands of this sea is defined by both absences and ever-present pasts, 'at once as present and taken for granted as my skin, as painfully absent as a phantom limb' (2019b: 4). The sea here is the topology of apparitions, giving a form and emotion to it.

In this volume, we follow a similar principle in terms of depicting a particular temporality related to the Black Sea, namely transience. In *Materialities of Passing*, Peter Bjerregaard, Anders Emil Rasmussen and Tim Flohr Sørensen define transience as when an object, person, group or event 'emerges as temporary or temporarily grounded and leaves a fleeting trace in their void' (2016: 19). We follow this definition, and also take our cue from Zygmunt Freud's short essay 'On Transience' to consider a wide range of topics connected to this notion. In the essay, Freud foregrounds a series of themes that transience gives rise to: beauty

and decay, war and recovery, the changing of seasons, mourning and hope (Freud 1957). Building on this, the volume shows how pebble coasts, broken infrastructures, pollution of the sea, changing weather or wars generate events, people and things that make up a transient topology and temporary aesthetics of the Black Sea.

There have been various geopolitical as well as scholarly attempts to render the Black Sea as a region and stuff it with specific cultural, political and economic content. The notion of transience, however, problematizes these very attempts and questions altogether the desire for fixed and bounded entities or regional meanings. Not only is the Black Sea, its winds and waves, continually flowing and changing, that is a content of the sea itself, but its politics, poetics and aesthetics are also in constant flux, affecting the way people or things come together. In telling the Black Sea story through the notion of transience, the book then frustrates any sense of coherence and denies the certainty of place and meaning (e.g. Martínez, Di Puppo and Frederiksen 2021). Instead, it follows the glimpses of transience that form a symbiotic relationship between the body and the sea. As Tamta Khalvashi describes in her contribution to this volume, transience and turbulence are traits not only of the sea, but the turbulence of the sea feels like one's own emotion.

Drawing on this, we present a transience-based epistemology of the Black Sea, which is a knowledge and sensibility about the sea and the coast that allows for movement as well as congestion through political imaginaries, infrastructures and everyday social experiences. The book, then, is an affective and cognitive approach to life through the transience of the sea. It depicts bodies, things and imaginaries according to how they flow in and by the sea, while emphasizing the importance of knowing where one is located inside a sea of transience. Thus, it is yet another kind of 'seascape epistemology' (Ingersol 2016: 5) that provides an approach to the Black Sea presumed on the local knowledge, imaginary and sensibility of transience. This book brings the physical movement and transience of the sea into an ontological perspective that speaks to different experiences of the Black Sea. Boats, dolphins, pebbles as well as refugees, tourists, breakaway states and repressed leftists all tell something about the transience of the Black Sea, and the traces it leaves. Whether in the form of poems, photo essays, ethnographic vignettes or longer articles, the individual contributions that follow all relate to aspects of transience, and bring out its qualities on/at the Black Sea. And the various forms of transience that emerge from the individual chapters will be put in relation to three general themes along which the volume is organized, namely poetics, politics and aesthetics.

Transience and Poetics

Poetics of the Black Sea entails how various encounters come together and produce forms of transience. These are poetics of momentary and fleeing encounters that leave lasting effects on people's memories and sensibilities about, and of, the sea. Encounters with the Black Sea are too immediate or too transitory to be linked with any preoccupation with identity and rooting. Such encounters, however, can often be contested, as they take multiple forms that sometimes generate ambivalent affects, imaginations and memories. Under these conditions, poetic encounters with the Black Sea go on the alert. Or to put it in Edouard Glissant's words, such encounters can take on a form of 'poetic relation' that is fragmentary, and 'abolish the linear projection of a sensibility toward the world's horizons' (1997: 31–32).

Encounters like these have a long history, for the Black Sea coast has always been a place of encounter and connivance, as well as a passageway between East and West, or between socialism and capitalism. We can trace such encounters on the Black Sea between locals and tourists (or anthropologists). As Mary C. Neuburger, for instance, notes in relation to the Red Riviera in Bulgaria in the 1960s and 1970s, tourism 'funded the increased ability of the Bulgarian state to provide a range of other goods and services to its urbanized and modernized population' (2013: 180). But just as significantly, 'during the 1960s the Black Sea coast became a place of East-West encounters amid the Bulgarian sand, sun, and resort pleasures. The regime, in fact, actively worked to promote Bulgaria as a tourist site to Americans and West Europeans, even working through diplomatic channels' (ibid.). Foreign thirsts for something exotic, she continues, could be met by the natural beauty, entertainment, glamour and modern forms of comfort which the coasts provided. Yet these encounters with and at the sea were not without fault lines, as forms of segregation through socioeconomics or fear were still present. 'Westerners were unquestionably restricted in their travel, while secret police and informers observed Bulgarians in their interactions with Westerners' (ibid.: 182).

This story of the Black Sea is strikingly similar to the scene described by Katherine Verdery in her short intermission, or what we have chosen to call a tide, with which the volume begins. Like tides, such intermissions about the Black Sea come and go in this volume, for they are as momentary and fleeing as the tide itself. Verdery's first encounter with the Black Sea, namely her first visit to the Romanian coastline in 1973, is indeed a perfect illustration of a fleeting or momentary poetics of encounter with the sea. During those days, she was there illegally as she had not

yet received her research permit. Yet even though this shrouded her first encounter with the sea with some degree of danger, it is the fleeting image of sunbathers covering themselves in muck on the beach that most vividly stands forth in her memory. Verdery's encounter with the Romanian coastline, then, is joyous, but still impressed by ambivalent sensibilities of encountering the Black Sea.

The poetics of momentary encounters with, at or on the sea is a common thread running through the three chapters that constitute Section 1 of this book. Based on very different empirical cases and styles, they highlight relations between moments of pausing and waiting, staying and leaving, as these emerge not only through encounters between locals and tourists, or even anthropologists, but also through encounters between lovers, spouses, traders, prostitutes, traffickers and all sorts of other strangers. The Black Sea may then be held up as one of the places in the world where such encounters seem to be gathering most vividly.

In Chapter 1, Vera Skvirskaja unfolds the encounters that happen on the maritime route Odessa–Istanbul – the route that has enabled a flight of small commodity traders, prostitutes, traffickers, spouses, tourists, students and migrants in the 1990s and 2000s. Together they create what Skvirskaja aptly calls 'coexistence on the move' on the Black Sea marked by temporary co-presences of different social classes, ethnicities, purposes and destinations. The temporality of coexistence provides a productive vantage point to understand the poetics of fleeting Black Sea mobilities as well as the sociality of transport and transit on the Black Sea.

Instead of focusing on maritime transport where such encounters happen and unfold, Elene Gavashelishvili in Chapter 2 focuses on sailors' wives living in the Black Sea city of Batumi in Georgia. As Gavashelishvili argues, encounters between sailors and their wives demonstrate a story of constant transience, connected both to husbands' temporary employment contracts on ships and to temporary physical cohabitation with husbands on land. Hence, these women expertly know how to read the surface of the sea through the colour of the ships, as they wait for their husbands at home for long periods of time. Every meeting between long-distance seafarers and their wives is like a process of reacquaintance. Consequently, such marriages take the form of what Gavashelishvili calls 'transient togetherness'. That is, a marriage based on continuous alternations between separation and reconnection, yet still a relation that can be long and steady.

In Chapter 3, Trine Mygind Korsby takes us on a journey from, and then back to, the coast of Romania in order to show how this coast emerges as a temporary place of attachment for some local women. For this, we follow the young girl Ramona who journeys to Rome with a young man from her hometown with whom she is in a romantic relationship. She is

well aware that the young man is not just her boyfriend but will also be her pimp when they arrive in Italy, but sex work is only meant to be a temporary solution until she manages to establish herself as a hairdresser. Korsby first meets Ramona in a women's shelter in Rome, and a few years later they meet again in Constanța, Romania. Ramona is now a mother and has married a local sailor. But their stay in Constanța, too, is only supposed to be temporary.

The section ends with yet another tide with a poem by Giorgi Maisuradze. This is a very different poetic encounter with the sea that takes the form of a prayer. The awe-inspiring sublimity of the Black Sea gives way to a spiritual flight from the city's dimly lit paths to escape, explore and pray for the depths, souls and froths of the Black Sea. The sea, then, becomes a zone of both horror and pleasure, and through the prayer to the sea, a complex aesthetic sensibility of the Black Sea is evoked, involving confrontation with the modern materiality of the city of Batumi that has been made invisible in the poem.

Taken together, the contributions in Section 1 presents us with a cultural poetics (Stewart 1996) of the Black Sea that vividly evokes an 'other' side of it. To be sure, the Black Sea in this section survives through momentary encounters, which have lasting effects and affects in people's lives. This particular aspect of the Black Sea, however, is excluded from the dominant narratives around it that nevertheless constitute an important part of its social imaginary. Stories of transient encounters and their complex configurations, in this way, give us a glimpse into everyday life on the Black Sea, where fleeing encounters gather, dissipate or endure.

Transience and Politics

Transience on the Black Sea, however, is not merely a matter of poetics of momentary encounters, but also of the continuing forms of politics that generate fault lines and borders at the sea, pointing to violence and coexistence, displacement, as well as changing national horizons. In the western or post-Soviet Russian cinematic imagination, however, more often than not the Black Sea figures unequivocally as military and naval space to be explored, dominated or tamed by the geopolitical powers. These imaginations often are inflected by securitizing tendencies that frame the Black Sea according to these dominant paradigms.

In the 2014 UK submarine disaster thriller film *Black Sea* directed by Kevin Macdonald and featuring Jude Law, the Black Sea features as a place of lost treasure that is endangered by regional security. In fact, the Black Sea, here, emerges as a shelter for the wreck of a U-boat from

World War II that sank off the coast of Georgia containing a cargo of gold worth millions. A veteran underwater captain and his crew embark on the salvage of this treasure, which had been stuck there due to territorial disputes following the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. In these kinds of cinematic iterations of the Black Sea, the transience brought by Russian-driven wars comes across as an obstacle to western desires and plans for the Black Sea. Transience emerges here not as something to be lived with, but to be tricked out and overcome through advanced technologies and sophisticated manoeuvres. This trend to portray the Black Sea as a place of security and danger resonates with the Cold War imaginations of the Black Sea that also divided the sea along security lines.

The same holds true, although in a different way, for the Russian military spy thriller TV series *The Black Sea*, financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and broadcast on the main Russian TV channel 1. This TV series, produced in 2020 and directed by Sergey Sherbin, evokes Crimea as a vital place for political confrontation between the Red Army and German underwater commandos just before the Battle of the Crimea in 1944. The ships of the Soviet Black Sea fleet and the Azov Naval Flotilla are in serious danger, for German underwater commandos are preparing a large-scale operation to destroy the main combat units of the Soviet fleet in ports and on roads. In this cinematic imaginary, the Black Sea emerges as a place for snooping on the plans of German troops by detecting and destroying the main base of German underwater saboteurs. The politics thus set in the show is about the evocation of the past glory of Soviet military troops in the Black Sea. It conceals not only the agency of Ukrainian troops to combat Nazi Germany, but also the very status of Crimea.

In these western and Russian cinematic evocations, the Black Sea does not feature as an ordinary place of life, but rather as a scene in which to make the presence of powerful 'others' transient, or at least tamed. Our volume tries to subvert such representations of the Black Sea by looking into other sides of transience, revealing more haunting and often devastating aspects. It is therefore with the haunting dimensions of transience and war immanent on the Crimean shores of the Black Sea that we continue our volume. This is first captured in the photo essay by Greta Uehling, which serves as a tide between Sections 1 and 2. Since the occupation and de facto annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation in 2014, Crimea has become a 'schizochronic' place in which a variety of temporal conjunctures bring past, present and future together. The transience inherent to Crimea today is one of being stuck in-between political statuses – it is no longer controlled by the Ukrainian government, but is not officially recognized as part of Russia.

Maps, toponyms, borders, street art and even nests and Black Sea stones all relate to what Uehling aptly calls an 'affective geography' of anxiety in Crimea, embodied by Crimean Tatars. For them, baskets hung on families' front porches to provide nests for swallows or stones collected on the shores of the Black Sea are emotional anchors to home and reminders of forceful displacement.

This photo-poetic tide about the Black Sea and its politics is followed by the full-length articles constituting Section 2, dealing more broadly with the politics and transience of the Black Sea. Christopher Houston, in Chapter 4, invites us to take a closer look at the transient leftist revolutionary consciousness and politics spread across the Turkish Black Sea that has been suppressed by nationalist governments. The leftist revolutionary enterprises and acoustic sensibilities were made transient in districts of Istanbul and on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, as they were targeted for 'special treatment' by the junta in the months immediately before and after the brutal 1980 military coup. Even possessing the tapes of Zulfu Livaneli, one of the most popular Turkish leftist singers, led to prosecution in the junta's military courts. Not only were leftist music and films heavily censured, along with their political associations, parties and ideologies, but creeks and villages were erased from the map to destroy the affective attachments to and revolutionary potential of these places. One such creek was Kızıldere, which became an inspiration for a leftist revolutionary group to write a song in which a creek itself takes revenge on the murderers. 'The creek is home to us, its water is the blood we sweat, the creek will not calm down', *Grup Yorum* sang. Despite the erasure of revolutionary spirit and the dominance of ultra-nationalist, neoliberal politics in Turkey today, leftist revolutionary potential is not entirely absent, Houston concludes. Or transience imposed by the state is not reducible to absence; it rather suggests haunting dimensions of revolutionary sensibility.

In Chapter 5, Mikel Venhovens takes us directly to the breakaway Abkhazian Black Sea. He explores the imagined transient nature of the de facto-ness of the state recognized only by six countries internationally, creating differing hopes for the residents of Abkhazian cities. Hopes for the future are unequally distributed among the ethnic Abkhaz living in Sokhum/i and ethnic Georgians living in Gal/i. They are embodied in the diverging material developments of these two cities. In Sokhum/i, ethnic Abkhaz are building holiday apartments in the hope of hosting more Russian tourists, while in Gal/i, homes of ethnic Georgians are undergoing continual ruination and decay. This material disparity generates dissimilar phases and sensibilities of the transience of de facto-ness, one orienting the residents of breakaway Abkhazia to the promises of the

future, the other instituting a sense of lack of that same future. Venhovens' arguments resonate with Görkem Aydemir's illuminating reflections on contingent homes in Gali. As she observes, for Georgians living in Gali, their decayed houses become transient spaces in which home emerges as a matter of being able to move across the disputed border, rather than returning to a singular and fixed place (Aydemir 2020). Abkhazia in both of these observations, then, emerges as a site of transience, a crossroads of longing and estrangement, memory and freedom, nostalgia and hope. It is also a space of mistrust and eeriness ignited by the renovated or dilapidated surfaces of new infrastructures built by the Georgian government at the border of the Abkhazian Black Sea to perform politically the luring vistas of the possible world of living (Khalvashi and Manning 2021; Mühlfried 2021).

Transience imposed by politics in this section is haunting, but it also bears a promising and perhaps even a transformative potential. How can such a potential be resuscitated or captured on the Black Sea? In the following Section 3, we unfold an aesthetics of transience that seems to illustrate this potential. If we consider aesthetics as an art of conceiving, imagining and acting, then the transience of the Black Sea gives rise to new configurations of life which, albeit temporary, generate constant turbulence, as well as the arts of dancing and collecting.

Transience and Aesthetics

In his reflection on Venice in *Watermark*, Joseph Brodsky writes that 'aesthetic sense is a twin of one's instinct of self-preservation and is more reliable than ethics' (1992: 109). Svetlana Boym has later referred to this as an 'aesthetic of survival' (2001: 303), a momentary overflowing of longing, nostalgia and grief. It is this aesthetic sense of survival or transience that is the main theme running through Section 3. The entire section is concerned with aesthetic uses and sensibilities of the sea that create new modes of engagement with and perception of the Black Sea. To continue with Brodsky's reflections on aesthetics in his *Watermark*, which concerns the dreamland city of Venice, 'water unsettles the principle of horizontality, especially at night, when its surface resembles pavement. No matter how solid its substitute – the deck – under your feet, on water you are somewhat more alert than ashore, your faculties are more poised' (1992: 14–15). This fluid sense of water, unlike solid land, triggers more alertness as well as imagination for aesthetic uses of the sea. For as Brodsky writes, the loss of direction is not merely navigational, but also psychological. The Black Sea, in this section, generates forms of transient motions and

emotions, and it is a place of dancing, floating, drifting, invading, driving away and collecting that becomes aestheticized. Aesthetics here, then, is not merely a matter of the experience of art, but rather the experience of materiality, infrastructure and environment (Bunn 2018; Larkin 2018; Scaramelli 2021) as these relate to the sea. It is what might be termed a 'blue aesthetics', of both motion and emotion, mood and water (Frederiksen 2013: 79ff; Alaimo 2017). And it is one that engages with breakdowns, dispossessions and reparations (Khalvashi 2018, 2019) as well as entities and lifeforms on, in and by the Black Sea, whether in the shape of boats, sea creatures or pebbles.

Before embarking on Section 3, we continue our volume with another tide, this one by Anna Dziapshipa whose photo-essayistic evocation of the phantasy Black Sea in Tbilisi is an aesthetic recuperation of the sea. Indeed, Dziapshipa's photo essay forms traces of wounds of conflict and war in the refugee settlement at Tbilisi Sea, which in reality is a water reservoir. This reservoir serves now as a reinvented dystopian paradise, one that permanently reminds Georgian refugees from Abkhazia of the ephemerality and transience of living by the Black Sea. The Tbilisi Sea becomes an alternative cosmos of collective reminiscence, a recovery of another temporality. Dziapshipa thus evokes this site as a conjuncture, a casting together of photos and lines of phantasy that occupy multiple temporalities of the Black Sea in Tbilisi.

Aesthetics of transience related to the Black Sea are, however, not merely imaginary, but also take real, material forms. In Chapter 6, Tamta Khalvashi describes such aesthetics in relation to makeshift boats that nevertheless are sources of anxiety and turbulence for their workers. How can turbulence on the sea become one's own emotion, giving rise to transient shapes and aesthetics of boats, Khalvashi asks? She explores this question by looking at makeshift tourist boats that once sailed on the Black Sea as fishing boats. These boats embody an aesthetics of transient maritime infrastructures in times of omnipresent privatization of the Batumi waterfront, evoking local expressions of anxiety, or *mghelvareba*, literally meaning turbulence on the sea. The verb of aquatic motion in Georgian then becomes the construal of emotion for makeshift boat workers. For they mourn the infrastructural transience and potential disappearance of the sea from their social, material and affective lives.

In Chapter 7, Caroline Humphrey turns her attention to the co-presences of different times that engage the Black Sea with aesthetic motion. She uses the metaphor of dance to conceptualize multi-species relations in and on the sea. Whereas other chapters in the volume focus mainly on aspects of culture and society, here we move towards a Black Sea ecology where sea creatures such as sea snails, algae and dolphins become

integral parts of the story. And, as Humphrey convincingly shows, this is a story in which themes that might otherwise be thought of as landbound, such as invasion, predation, dependence, discharge, association, attraction and migration, equally play out. Life below water is as transient as it is on shore, and as Humphrey notes, there is a continuous 'co-presence of different timescales that are nevertheless connected' and which momentarily lead to a transient dance between species, human and animal alike.

The co-presence of different times that may momentarily bring something, or someone, to light is also a central aspect in the chapter by Martin Demant Frederiksen. In it, we follow the character Svetlana and her practice of collecting pebbles and stones along the coastline, and of arranging them in her home and making them change their appearance by re-immersing them in water. But we also follow Svetlana's own appearance, and how she comes to be perceived differently as a wave of war flows over the city of Batumi. Being a foreigner, her appearance suddenly becomes a dys/appearance (Frederiksen 2016). That is, rather than disappearing into the background as before, her appearance suddenly comes to stand out in a problematic way, bringing into question what does and does not count as common ground in the wake of conflict.

Section 3, in sum, brings about transient aesthetics of the Black Sea that generate and gather multiple motions, durations and emotions. The aesthetics of these emotions, motions and durations, one of the traits of the Black Sea, appear to take up the relay from the aesthetics of the fleeing moment. Like the lingering colours, shivers and rhythms of the Black Sea that are sometimes disrupted by stormy weather, so the momentary aesthetics of the sea verges on rhythmic amassings and the co-presences of durations, generating multiple emotions.

The section ends with Stephanos Papadopoulos's poem 'The Refugees', which depicts a scene that could have taken place anywhere along the Black Sea coast throughout time. It could be Russian refugees fleeing from Moscow and reaching Odessa in 1918, as described by the Russian writer and satirist Teffi in her *Memories* (Teffi 2016).[1] For her, and her companions, being by the sea was inevitably momentary, although what would follow that momentariness could be two very different things: if the Bolsheviks in Moscow were defeated, then they would return home; if the Bolsheviks gained more ground, the sea would not merely be a final stop but an entity to be crossed. Yet whatever the outcome, the encounter would be brief, and every person they encountered had to be met with some degree of suspicion. Papadopoulos's poem could be about this event, but it could just as easily be about more recent streams of people reaching the shoreline in the hopes of escape, such as Syrians crossing the sea at night from Turkey to Romania in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis;

it could be about Georgians fleeing Abkhazia in Soviet tourist boats as a result of the war in 1992–93. In reality, it is about the exodus of the Pontic Greeks in the 1920s. There are myriads of other stories about the Black Sea exodus, like the Muhajirs escaping ethnic persecution in the Caucasus or the Balkans to the Ottoman Empire. And it is no surprise that many of these troubled crossings of the sea have prompted streams of poetry. Poetry and the Black Sea have become integral to capturing the transient encounters with the sea.

At Sea Level

The theme of the 14th Istanbul Biennale of 2015 was Saltwater, inspired by the patterns, waves, currents and densities of the Bosporus. For the accompanying catalogue, Orhan Pamuk penned a short essay entitled 'The Sea'. In it, he depicts his personal relation to the Black Sea through a description of an annually repeated event: his first dip of the season. 'At any given moment of any ordinary day, a single glance at the Bosphorus in the distance can make me feel at home, in a familiar realm', he writes, continuing:

> The sea in Istanbul is like a trusty old friend. I never doubt it. I see it every day. If I go too long without seeing it, I feel bereft. But once a year, that trust is broken, and on that day I discover there is a whole other sea inside of me. On that day I remember that the sea is a large and terrifying world full of chemical salts, weird insects, crusty creatures, and poisonous fish, an infernal liquid that could engulf me at a moment's notice and drown me before I have a chance to catch my breath. (Pamuk 2014: 116)

In this experience, the deeply and intimately familial suddenly comes to merge with fear and darkness, and he tells himself before diving in that he will just swim briefly and then get right out again. But once emerged, he realizes that being at sea level 'is a boon', one that both clears his thoughts and makes him think differently.

> As I go about my life in Istanbul, walking down its streets and pacing inside its rooms, the instinct that takes hold every time I glimpse the Bosphorus – the urge to grab pen and paper and draw a ship on any scrap I happen to find – is deeply connected to all that is unfathomable about the sea. (Ibid.)

The mix of sensations and affects that Pamuk describes in his essay, all brought about by the sea, also runs deep in the chapters and intermissions that follow here, as do considerations of thinking differently about,

and because of, the sea. In the Conclusion to the volume, we will return to this and tease out what a focus on transience and the sea may tell us on a broader level, both about the relation between water and the imagination, and between mourning and life. Until then, we invite readers to dive in.

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Notes

1. Her real name was Nadezhda Alexandrovna Lokhvitskaya (1872–1952).

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