

MICRONATIONS AND THE SEARCH FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Political disagreement is a fact of life. It can prompt people to stand for public office and agitate for political change. Others take a different route; they start their own nation. *Micronations and the Search for Sovereignty* is the first comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of people purporting to secede and create their own country. It analyses why micronations are not states for the purposes of international law, considers the factors that motivate individuals to separate and found their own nation, examines the legal justifications that they offer and explores the responses of recognised sovereign states. In doing so, this book develops a rich body of material through which to reflect on conventional understandings of statehood, sovereignty and legitimate authority. Authored in a lively and accessible style, *Micronations and the Search for Sovereignty* will be valuable reading for scholars and general audiences.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009150125

DOI: 10.1017/9781009150132

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First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-009-15012-5 Hardback

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Sovereignty
Cambridge University Press
Harry Hobbs, George Williams;
978-1-609-15012-5 Micronations and the Search for Sovereignty Micronations and the Search for
Frontmatter
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PREFACE

People across the world have sought to secede and establish their own independent micronation. Their motivations for doing so can reflect their personal commitments and eccentricities and are as diverse as the nations they seek to create. Secession might be seen as the only possible course of action to resolve a long-running dispute with the local council or as a final act of defiance after decades of frustration with regulation and government bureaucracy. Establishing a new country might also be designed to promote tourism to a region, to create an art project, to parody the workings of the state or even to defraud unsuspecting people.

Micronations have been founded around the globe for these and other reasons. Once established, they seek to assert their claims to sovereignty in a myriad of ways. They issue coins, print stamps, compose national anthems, invest themselves with royal titles and sometimes even declare war on recognised states. Roy Bates – or to use his full title, Prince Roy of Sealand – who graces our cover from his Principality in the North Sea, is just one of the many micronationalists who has taken such steps.

Micronations are a subject of fascination for many people, and regularly attract worldwide attention. There is something inherently interesting about the idea that any one of us could break away to form our own nation, complete with royal titles and the trappings of a real state. Despite this, the phenomenon has been almost completely ignored by legal scholars and political scientists. This reflects a view that micronations are more suited to humour than serious study. After all, the prospect that an individual or small band of people could separate from a recognised state and establish their own legally recognised nation is fanciful.

We have written this book because there is more to this story. By dressing in the language of sovereignty, micronations challenge understandings of and approaches to international legal personality. They also catalyse larger questions about the nature of statehood, sovereignty and legitimate authority. The creativity and persistent attempts of micronations to find cracks in the law to justify their existence also raise

important legal and political questions. Can the proponents of sea steading create a viable state by constructing floating structures on the high seas outside of national jurisdiction? How do states respond to these potential challengers? Does state acquiescence to the continued existence of a micronation have any legal effect? Could a micronation ever become a state? If not, what value do micronationalists see in statehood? These are some of the questions that micronations pose. They are the sorts of issue that motivated us to write this book to provide the first comprehensive treatment of micronations from a legal and political vantage point.

Many people have helped to shape this book. We thank colleagues at the Faculty of Law at the University of Technology Sydney and the Faculty of Law and Justice at the University of New South Wales, who offered helpful comments on draft papers. In particular, we thank Katherine Biber, Sara Dehm, Rosalind Dixon, Kun Fan, Fleur Johns, Zsafia Korosy, David Leary, Lucas Lixinski, Jane McAdam, Nicola McGarrity, Brian Opeskin, Prue Vines, Genevieve Wilkinson and Stephen Young. We also thank Tom Randall from Cambridge University Press for his enthusiasm for this project and Priyanka Durai for her excellent work on the manuscript.

Harry also thanks Annabel Johnson for her patience as he excitedly recounted the exploits of micronationalists on long walks together, as well as his parents, Karina and Neil, and sister, Georgia, who encouraged his love of world maps and flags. George thanks Emma Armson, and their children Edward and Eleanor, whose attempts at independence and rule of their household augurs well for their future as micronationalists.

Finally, this book could not have been written without the drive and energy of those many people – some of whom we discuss – who made the decision to throw off the shackles of the old and create their own country.