



# Living with Liminality: De Facto States on the Threshold of the Global

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DESPITE A COMMON BELIEF THAT sovereignty is clear and indivisible, the world is littered with cases of compromised sovereignty. Enclaves, exclaves, protectorates, and autonomous regions are all forms of government that do not fit the Westphalian mold of a single state controlling people within a well-defined territory. The UN protectorate of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the autonomous Kurdish government of northern Iraq, the British overseas territory of the Falkland Islands, and tribal sovereignty in the United States are all exceptions to the Westphalian rule. Indeed, the more closely we examine a map of the world, the more we see that it is covered with such exceptions, and there seems to be no state that is not touched by some form of sovereign exceptionality. Furthermore, today's supranational political and legal institutions, such as the European Union and the International Criminal Court (ICC), today reach across borders and compel sovereign states to combat corruption or conform to human rights norms in an exception to the Westphalian rule of non-intervention. Given such a wide array of existing sovereign anomalies, unrecognized or de facto states may seem a bit less exceptional. They are entities that look like states and act like states but lack legal international recognition and so exist outside the "community of nations." But does this not simply make them another set of cases where Westphalia has failed?

This essay asserts that de facto states are, indeed, exceptions to the exception, anomalous among sovereign anomalies. Moreover, the factors that make

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these unrecognized entities different from other sovereign anomalies extend far beyond the general perception that these entities violate the international system of sovereign states.<sup>1</sup> If sovereignty may be conceived of as “a general ticket of admission to the international arena,” then unrecognized states are the ones standing outside, looking for an alternative way into the international system.<sup>2</sup> However, contrary to this metaphor of exclusion from a closed sovereignty game, what *de facto* states experience is not being locked *out* but being locked *in*: they suffer from varying degrees of economic and political isolation that turn them into *de facto* enclaves. Indeed, the sociology of enclaves and ghettos may give us many clues to the internal dynamics of unrecognized states.

The metaphor of waiting on a doorstep points us to another feature of *de facto* states: their long-term liminality. The *limen* in “liminality” is a threshold, and in anthropology, to be at the *limen* is to be caught in between one state of being and another. In politics, the transition would be from one regime to another, or from one ideology to another. Many former Soviet states have grappled with a turbulent transition from the one-party planned economy of the Soviet system to liberal democracy. Observers have often employed the term “liminality” to describe their current condition.<sup>3</sup> *De facto* states may be described as permanently liminal, stuck between the political form they once were and the recognized body politic they wish to become. Such states metaphorically stand in the doorway of the international arena but are not yet able to cross the threshold that would allow them to become real sovereign states.

All of these features lead *de facto* states to exhibit what Nina Caspersen, in her comparative overview of unrecognized states, calls “ambiguous statehood.”<sup>4</sup> *De facto* states claim independence while relying on patrons; they desire to be open to the world but are also highly protective of borders; and they often want to establish their democratic credentials while being built on ethnic cleansing.<sup>5</sup> Their status as liminal enclaves gives shape to their ambiguous statehood. Moreover, this outcome becomes clearest when their isolation begins to break down, when they begin to engage or interact with the world. While literature in the past two decades has often described globalization as a phenomenon that breaks down borders, paradoxically citizens of *de facto* states find that globalization only makes them more aware of the borders they cannot cross.

The case of northern Cyprus shows how, in confrontations with global capital and trans- or supranational institutions, citizens of unrecognized states find the institutions that constitute and represent the state in their daily lives becoming more real, even as statehood—what we might call the idea of the state—takes on an increasingly fictional character. These contradictions, in





turn, lead to increasing uncertainty about the future, as well as instability in political life. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is one of the two states, along with Taiwan, that have shown the greatest longevity as de facto entities. Yet today there exists a common perception among citizens that “a state called the TRNC never existed and never will”—or, as a small business owner remarked, “There’s no state here; there’s an administration.”<sup>6</sup> Voices proclaiming the nonexistence of a state in Cyprus’s north have proliferated in the past decade, and as should be clear from the examples below, proclamations of the state’s nonexistence have been accompanied by widespread anxiety and political unrest. While this article focuses on one case, what is described below may be expected to occur in other unrecognized states with the passage of time and increased engagement with the world.

Moreover, a de facto state is internationally unrecognized because it is part of an unresolved conflict where sovereignty is the main stake. Because of the widespread though outdated perception that sovereignty is all or nothing, internationally brokered negotiations seek comprehensive solutions that would resolve all issues of sovereignty, governance, and territory in one stroke of a pen. The goal of such solutions would be to dissolve these sovereign anomalies, whether through negotiation to bring them under a federal umbrella—as in the cases of Transnistria and Cyprus—or through reincorporation into the “parent state”—in some cases by force, as occurred in 2008–09 in Sri Lanka. One of the main fears driving dissolution or reincorporation is that the separatist entity will gradually strengthen its state and gain creeping legitimacy—as occurred in Somaliland, Transnistria, northern Cyprus, and Abkhazia, for example. Because of this fear, any proposal short of a comprehensive solution is viewed as an underhanded way of supporting the separatist entity. The conclusion of this article suggests that the standard frameworks for resolving conflicts over sovereignty do not account for the peculiar features of de facto entities or the changing ways that sovereignty is perceived, contested, and practiced in a globalized world.

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## **DE FACTO STATES AS ENCLAVES**

The 1999 documentary *Coconut Revolution*, which tells the story of the secessionist rebellion of Bougainville Island, describes the ingenuity that Bougainvilleans demonstrated under an eight-year blockade enforced by Papua New Guinea. Bougainvilleans became self-sufficient, revived traditional medicine, and recycled





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materials from a defunct copper mine to build a hydroelectric generator and distill coconut oil for fuel. The first leader of the revolution, Francis Ona, remarked in the film that their isolation had brought its benefits: “I think with the blockade still on, that would be very nice. Because then we will be learning more and more and advance into near future. So that new things will come, new ideas grown.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the cases of England during the Blitz and the siege of Sarajevo show how in states of emergency, hierarchies may be leveled, ingenuity may be prized, and social equality may become the de facto norm. Indeed, stories of solidarity and resourcefulness under siege abound, and in the interest of survival, new sets of norms and values have often emerged.

De facto states may be viewed as enclaves produced by economic embargos and political isolation that, for those who experience them, often resemble the conditions of a siege. These conditions lead to forms of intense solidarity as well as the creation of opportunities outside the international system. Some have argued that marginalization encourages black-market economies and illegal trade.<sup>8</sup> At a minimum, it allows such states to avoid cumbersome human rights and environmental obligations. Indeed, “it could be argued that many post-modern unrecognized states often find the ambiguous political and economic space provided by their anomalous status to be more attractive than the other highly romanticized option of independent statehood.”<sup>9</sup> Mete Hatay and I have argued that it may indeed be possible to “enjoy one’s exception,” an enjoyment that citizens often experience retrospectively as nostalgia for periods of deprivation that are also moments of solidarity and ingenuity.<sup>10</sup> Post-Soviet *Ostalgie* would be one example of such a nostalgia for deprivation.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Turkish Cypriots in recent years have become nostalgic for the 1963–74 enclave period, a time of intense solidarity under siege.

De facto states appear to share many of the characteristics that define other sorts of enclaves, ghettos, and isolated entities, all of which are built on conditions of insecurity and a persistent threat or belief in a threat from the outside world. The anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her study of religious enclaves, found this to be one of the fundamental conditions of such enclaves and in addition noted several features deriving from such isolation that may be applied to thinking about de facto states. First, she observed that within the enclave, the sense of insecurity often develops into a hostility to the outside world or a sense that one is persecuted by it. Second, she found that enclaves tend to be egalitarian and prevent the development of hierarchies. This is the case because remaining in the enclave is largely voluntary, which leads to her third observation: one of the greatest fears within an enclave is what Douglas





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calls the leakage of members, or the loss of large numbers of its population to the world outside the enclave. This loss occurs primarily because of the temptations of the community from which they have separated, specifically, “the main community outside, rich, powerful and alluring, tempts members away from their enclave loyalty.”<sup>12</sup> The suggestion drawn from her study is that the less one knows about or interacts with the outside world, the more stable the enclave.

The secessionist entities that become de facto states find their beginnings in the enclavism of wartime, when, like the religious communities of Douglas’s study, they willingly break away from what is usually known as their parent state. This breakaway is a voluntary move that is normally a survival strategy as well, demonstrated when Turkish Cypriots retreated to militarized enclaves from 1963 to 1974 and were put under a military and economic siege by Greek Cypriot forces for the first five years of that period. My own and other studies of Turkish Cypriot displacement during this time have shown that fear drove them out of their homes, even if the Turkish Cypriot leadership also had in place the mechanisms of a proto-state that made the arming and supplying of the enclaves easier.<sup>13</sup> In such circumstances of fear and perceived persecution—which Douglas identifies as one of the main features of enclaves—it is difficult to separate forced displacement from voluntary ghettoization or the institutions of daily survival from the structures of a nascent parallel state.<sup>14</sup>

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Such histories of isolation in turn develop the sense of solidarity and egalitarianism that characterizes communities under siege.<sup>15</sup> One European academic with a long-time familiarity with Abkhazia volunteered that Abkhaz have a “siege mentality” that is introverted and leads to intolerance of difference and rising stars.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, almost all unrecognized states have minuscule populations—ranging from perhaps 72,000 people in South Ossetia to 500,000 in Transnistria.<sup>17</sup> These two population characteristics indicate that personal relations are an important form of capital that tend to keep in check extraordinary abuses of power.<sup>18</sup> This also seems to partially explain Nina Caspersen’s observation that unrecognized states very often have multiparty democracies while also desiring to demonstrate unity and consensus, thus showing tendencies of being both “open and closed, pluralistic and homogenous.”<sup>19</sup> A civil society leader in Abkhazia, for instance, remarked that newspapers have been proliferating, printing attacks on politicians and a multitude of views that at times verges on the chaotic.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of 2014, northern Cyprus has sixteen daily newspapers, eight television channels, fifteen radio stations, and a growing number of internet media outlets for a de jure population of around 280,000. This means that television program hosts and newspaper columnists





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are very often average citizens who wish to express their views. This egalitarian plurality of voices, however, exists alongside calls for unity around negotiations for reunification, which affect the community as a whole.

At the same time, the isolation of these entities limits educational and economic opportunities and, as Douglas suggests, leads to a fear of emigration. This fear is compounded in most cases by worries of being outnumbered, a fear that many minorities have historically faced. Offering public services is the primary strategy that can tie citizens to the unrecognized entities and prevent what Douglas calls the “leakage of members.”<sup>21</sup> This action may include the distribution of vacated property left behind by enemy others who have fled; it can also include giving salaries and other benefits as rewards to former fighters and as compensation to persons who have lost loved ones. One way in which Abkhazia has attempted to increase its population is distributing citizenship—and where requested, property—to members of the Abkhaz diaspora, which by most accounts far outnumber the population of Abkhaz in Abkhazia itself.<sup>22</sup> As one young Turkish member of the Abkhaz diaspora explained, “I got my citizenship, because even if I’m not thinking of settling here, I want to help the population appear larger.”<sup>23</sup> Other public services include national industries, free health care, and most importantly, permanent positions in the public sector. Bloated public service sectors characterize northern Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria, and in most of these cases the state is the single largest employer.<sup>24</sup>

The direct links between state employment and the fear of leakage may be seen when, for instance, access to salaries and services is curtailed by the patron state, which supports the bloated budgets of the isolated client. Turkey, Russia, and Armenia all pour military and economic aid into their client states, but this aid is not without restrictions. In 2011, Turkey and northern Cyprus signed a protocol that insured Turkey’s financial support while imposing a calendar for implementing austerity, reform, and privatization measures in the island’s north. The measures, which included a proposal for a new public sector law that would raise the retirement age and limit benefits, were met with large-scale protests. The law itself came to be known as the “Emigration Law” because “the unions say that in the event that this law is implemented, Turkish Cypriots won’t be able to live anymore and will have to emigrate.”<sup>25</sup> As one online commentator remarked, “The ‘Emigration Law’ in its essence, while purporting to be a law for social security, will actually be the destruction of Turkish Cypriots’ identity, culture, and economy.”<sup>26</sup>

De facto states, then, share many of the features of enclaves, and indeed







may be seen as enclaves that are defined by economic embargo and political isolation. Complete isolation is rarely possible, however, and there are always nodes or points of interaction with the outside world, which may increase due to globalization and transnational institutions. The case of northern Cyprus demonstrates that an increase in those points of interaction—while not leading to the dissolution of the enclave—can cause the liminal nature of a de facto state to come to the fore. After all, it is one thing to stand behind a closed door and imagine that the world on one's own side of the door is sufficient. It is quite another thing to see the door swing open to reveal a wider, richer world that one is only allowed to observe from the threshold, without crossing.

### AT THE THRESHOLD OF SOVEREIGNTY

Between 1974 and 2003, the ceasefire line that divides Cyprus acted as a closed border, preventing Cypriots from crossing to the other side. Because the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was internationally recognized as sovereign over the entire island, international travel into northern Cyprus's airport and harbors was prohibited. As a result, Turkish Cypriots had only one door to the world: the door that opened onto Turkey. Turkey remains the one state that recognizes the TRNC, and the door continues to swing both ways. While that door enabled Turkish Cypriots to leave the island for work and study and to sell their goods, Turkey also aids the TRNC economically and militarily. Turkish citizens have flooded the north as cheap labor and students for northern Cyprus' growing university sector. Until 2003 tourists who wished to stay in northern Cyprus had to enter via Turkey, while Turkish Cypriots acquired Turkish passports, as their own had only limited use.<sup>27</sup> However, Turkey during this period was introverted and unstable, suspicious of its neighbors and embroiled in ideological and ethnic conflicts. Although Turkish Cypriots had a back door to the world, it was not a very reliable one and it did not open very far. Turkish politicians tended to treat Cyprus as a national cause, encouraging the intransigence of Turkish Cypriot leaders and viewing the island's north as a de facto province.<sup>28</sup> Gradually, some Turkish Cypriots, especially the youth, began to see Turkey—their single door into the world—not as their protector, but as the guardian of their prison.

The so-called "EU catalyst" changed these parameters. Despite Turkish Cypriot objections, in the mid-1990s the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) unilaterally submitted an application to the European Union that eventually won the RoC candidate status. When accession negotiations ended in late 2002, and it became clear that their Greek Cypriot partners would enter the EU without





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them, Turkish Cypriots rebelled. Their rebellion caused the opening of crossing points in the island in April 2003, and it sent their leaders back to the negotiating table. At the same time that the RoC's EU negotiations were drawing to a close, the United Nations picked up speed on negotiations to reunify the island ahead of the RoC's EU entry. What came to be known as the Annan Plan, after UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, was negotiated throughout 2003 and finally put to an island-wide referendum in 2004. This plan would have united the island as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. While 65 percent of Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan, 76 percent of Greek Cypriots rejected it. A week later, Greek Cypriots entered the EU without Turkish Cypriots, who technically were partners in the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus.

Because the RoC is accepted as sovereign over the entire island, today the entirety of Cyprus is technically part of the EU, even though EU law, the *acquis communautaire*, is suspended in the island's north. Moreover, because the RoC claims all Turkish Cypriots as its citizens, the opening of the crossing points became an opportunity for Turkish Cypriots to claim RoC identity cards and EU passports. As a result, Turkish Cypriots now have another door onto the world—but it comes with costs, as the RoC has become a new gatekeeper for Turkish Cypriots wishing to trade, study, and travel. And while the EU has attempted to engage with Turkish Cypriots, and provide funding for infrastructure and other improvements that would bring their standard of life closer to that in the south, the RoC government has insisted on approving and controlling EU involvement in the island's north. EU engagement in the north tends to be timid and restricted, hampered by many of the same restrictions that apply to the UN and other international organizations operating there.

When Turkish Cypriots rallied in Nicosia's main squares in late 2002 and early 2003, they received the support of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP had recently come to power, and the party wished to clear the obstacle of Cyprus out of its path to the EU. It quickly became clear that the AKP would pursue a new vision of Turkey's regional role and that it wished to be seen as a broker rather than an introverted giant. Nationalists in both Turkey and Cyprus accused the Turkish leadership of selling out Cyprus to win the goodwill of the EU, while many others suspected Turkey of having proposed a plan that Greek Cypriots would not accept in order to create a positive impression without in fact having to compromise. Certainly, the effect of the referendum has been an increased willingness of international actors to interact with Turkish Cypriot political and civil society leaders, in addition to a growing international acceptance that Turkish Cypriots have a political will







and are not simply puppets of their patron. These changes, in turn, have led to increasing acknowledgment among EU representatives and international actors that there is a state in the island's north with its own institutions and political culture. Some would argue that this is a form of creeping recognition and must surely have been Turkey's intent in supporting the Annan Plan.

Despite the failure of that plan, life in northern Cyprus has not been the same since the border opening gave them a second door onto the world. One of the biggest changes since 2003 has been an improvement in the material conditions of Turkish Cypriots' lives and a relative opening-up to the world. At the same time, the Greek Cypriot entry into the EU and the failure of the Annan Plan have left Turkish Cypriots with the sense that they have exhausted their options. The two projects of recognition and reunification both failed. Although international actors still cling to hopes for a negotiated settlement, Cypriots on both sides of the island have been skeptical for some years now. Turkey's economic and regional rise, Greece's financial catastrophe, the meltdown of south Cyprus's banks, and systemic crisis in the EU have all contributed to Turkish Cypriots' current sense that there is nowhere else for them to turn. If liminality is a transition phase, Turkish Cypriots now do not know what stage will follow that transition. This makes their liminality appear indefinite, leaving them in a state of uncertainty. *Belirsizlik*, the Turkish word for uncertainty, is how Turkish Cypriots invariably describe their state, their identity, and their quotidian existence. One columnist, for instance, called northern Cyprus "the country of uncertainty," remarking, "Is there any other people, society, or tribe in the world that for more than half a century has asked 'I wonder if there will be a solution?' and declared every year 'The Year of Peace'? What kind of never-ending torment is this?"<sup>29</sup>

As we noted, liminality defines the Turkish Cypriots' enclave, though it is not an enclave of their choosing. Their inability to transition into a real state means they remain outside the international system as the subject of embargo and isolation. And it is here that liminality theory and enclave theory meet, for both foresee instability and chaos. One of Douglas's observations regarding enclaves is that when the original reason for going into the enclave disappears or eases, the enclave tends to break up in internal disagreement. "I have been foretelling inevitable failure as the destiny of enclave societies," she remarked. "Authority is unprotected, leadership is under challenge, decisions have no coherent institutional framework."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the liminal state is defined as transitional and disorienting. What I suggest here, however, is that Turkish Cypriots became fully aware of their liminality, of the limits of their enclave, when a real door





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onto the world opened. Until that moment, isolated and engrossed in their own problems, it was possible to pretend that they had a state. It was the legal, economic, and political encroachment of global and transnational institutions that has made their sustained liminality clear while offering no concrete way out of their enclave.

Some examples should make clear why Turkish Cypriots' relative opening to the world has reduced their own sense of their state's legitimacy and has left the future uncertain. In fact, Turkish Cypriots' first tangible encounter with a supranational institution occurred in the late 1990s, when a Greek Cypriot woman, Titina Loizidou, won a test case against Turkey in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR's 1996 judgment found that Turkey was indeed responsible for her inability to access her property in the island's north, and ordered Turkey to pay compensation.<sup>31</sup> It was in this period that Turkish Cypriots realized that their isolation was not the protective cocoon that it had seemed. Their hold on the territory where they lived began to seem phantasmic. Property soon became the most important and anxiety-producing issue for average Cypriots in thinking about the future.

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This anxiety reached its peak after the opening of the checkpoints, when a Greek Cypriot named Meletis Apostolides decided to sue an English couple, David and Linda Orams, who had built a villa on his northern Cyprus property.<sup>32</sup> With the crossing points open, he was able to sue the Orams in the courts of the RoC, have a summons delivered to their door, and have the decision against them enforced in European courts. This civil suit ran in tandem with the attempts of several thousand Greek Cypriots to have the ECHR hear their cases, something the court was reluctant to do after Greek Cypriot rejection of the reunification plan in 2004. In 2005, following the case of *Xenidis-Arestis v. Turkey*, the northern Cyprus government—as Turkey's “subordinate local authority”—set up an Immovable Property Commission (IPC) to hear cases related to loss of property. Access to the commission requires that Greek Cypriots apply in the north, and Greek Cypriot press and politicians have tended to vilify those who have attempted to solve their property problems in this way. In the subsequent case of *Demopoulos v. Turkey* in 2010, the court found the IPC to be an effective local remedy and ruled such local remedies were valid, even in cases of occupation in which they were instituted by a de facto regime.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Demopoulos decision relieved much of the anxiety that had come to surround the property issue in the island's north, it did so only by recognizing the TRNC as Turkey's “subordinate local authority.” This is similar to the way that, after the RoC's entry to the EU, northern Cyprus began to be





called “the area not under the effective control of the Government of Cyprus.”<sup>34</sup> This designation simultaneously implied that the ceasefire line dividing the island was not recognized as a border, and that the RoC might have *de jure* but not *de facto* sovereignty over the north. Hence, even at the moment that an institution in the island’s north was recognized as a sufficient local remedy by a supranational court, the state that validated that court appeared to become more fictional.

For many people, this contradiction was represented by the Orams case, the civil suit mentioned above that ended with a British court threatening to confiscate the Orams’ U.K. property if they did not demolish the villa they had built in the Greek Cypriot owner’s orchard and pay him compensation. The TRNC played for time: when the Orams applied to local authorities to demolish the villa, their application was rejected. This was an everyday sovereignty game in which one poorly built villa came to stand for the inviolability of TRNC territory. The government’s floundering attempts to prop up its sovereign inviolability in this case became the subject of local mockery. One commentator remarked, “At the moment that the ‘Orams’ virus entered its body, the TRNC was finished. Still, you took it to Brussels, to London, looking for a cure. And in London it died.”<sup>35</sup>

Law is only one area where Turkish Cypriots’ engagement with supranational or global institutions has simultaneously propped up their state and shaken their belief in its sovereignty. Since the failed referendum, the EU and international organizations have attempted to implement a strategy of “engagement without recognition” with similar effects.<sup>36</sup> Over the past decade the EU, the United Nations Development Programme, and USAID have all been active in funding projects in the island’s north, such as cultural heritage renovation and projects for civil society development. In addition, the EU has been active since 2004 in improving northern Cyprus’ infrastructure, such as sewage and roads. However, the EU places limits, for instance, on the types of sites that may be selected for restoration in the north. These must be either original Turkish property—hence, with no claims by displaced owners—or state property. In a few instances, sites have received approval from former Greek Cypriot residents through bicommunal initiatives. The effect of such restrictions is to turn the average landscape into one in which certain properties appear to be stamped by the EU as legitimate, while others receive legitimization through the inclusion of Greek Cypriots as “stakeholders.”<sup>37</sup>

Another instance in which engagement without recognition can be seen in action is in the EU regulations intended to encourage trade between Greek





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Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots across the UN-controlled buffer zone, commonly known as the Green Line. This decision was supposed to provide one way in which Turkish Cypriot goods could reach Europe and be sold in the south—through Turkish Cypriots finding partners in the south who would sell their goods there or help export the goods for them. Turkish Cypriots have had trouble exporting produce to Europe since the 1990s, when a European Court of Justice ruling forbade the import of products bearing the TRNC stamp. Greek Cypriots have tended to portray anything grown or made in the north as having been grown or made on stolen Greek Cypriot lands or properties. As a result, Turkish Cypriots have often had difficulty in finding partners in the south who are willing to take their goods, except in cases where it was possible to disguise their origins.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the Green Line Regulation that controls this trade recognizes only the ports in the island's south as legal ones through which goods may be exported to Europe. In other words, although the EU has attempted to encourage trade, it does so through mechanisms that ask Turkish Cypriots to acknowledge the illegitimacy of their own means of export and sale.

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On the other hand, global capital has primarily entered the north via Turkey, whose businesspeople have also increasingly invested in this small polity over the past decade. Indeed, the past decade has witnessed a rapid transformation of the consumer landscape in northern Cyprus. Shopping areas that were once filled with dim, chaotic shops selling pirated goods have been replaced by well-lit, well-designed branches of Adidas, Nike, and Mango. Global businesses such as Re/Max, HSBC, and Gloria Jean's have opened in the north in the past few years because they see it as a province of Turkey. This move has resulted in some backlash: for instance, when HSBC opened a branch in northern Cyprus several years ago, it drew the ire of Greek Cypriots, and HSBC was unable to open similar branches in the island's south. In spite of that, the corporation seemed to think that Turkish business was more important, and a number of other global corporations are starting to make similar gambles. At the same time, pirated DVD and CD shops are everywhere, while taxes on hotel casinos and brothel areas outside the main cities are important sources of state revenue.<sup>39</sup> As a result, Turkish Cypriots recognize that they are incorporated into the global economy as passive consumers rather than as producers, that their marginal position leaves them consuming originals but producing semblances and fakes.

In addition, Turkish capital has been flowing into the island in the form of large hotels, casinos, and shopping malls, while Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has approved an enormous project to bring water by underwater cable from the southern Turkish coast. Known as "The Project of





the Century” (*Asrın Projesi*), it has left Turkish Cypriots bewildered by a Turkish government that has taken a paternalistic attitude toward them, claiming that it will implement projects for their own good while at the same time enriching Turkish industry. As one union leader explained, “Now big capital is coming from Turkey, they’re bringing a Turk Mall, a Mediterranean Mall, but where is all this going? They’re not contributing to production here; they’re just interfering with and taking over the trade that exists. It’s a dangerous situation.”<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, citizens of unrecognized states appear to be burdened inevitably by what one International Crisis Group report, referring to the Russia–South Ossetia relationship, called the “burden of recognition.”<sup>41</sup> While patron states provide access to the world, they do so on their own terms, and these terms are usually based on their own interests. Moreover, the weaker, dependent state has difficulty maintaining its autonomy. Another union leader commented, “On paper the only country that recognizes the TRNC is Turkey, but in practice when we look at that relationship it’s not anything like that between two states.”<sup>42</sup> In the northern Cyprus case, the tendency to see the island as having an ethnic identification with its patron state further encourages intervention, which in turn tends to be interpreted as a threat of colonization by those de facto states subjected to it.<sup>43</sup>

These examples suggest that non-recognition of de facto states leads to other forms of engagement or acknowledgement that have the paradoxical effect of making the institutions of state appear more “real” while statehood itself appears fictional. These institutions have this effect because in daily life, when Turkish Cypriots use these institutions or try to access the wider world, they also tacitly accept through their practices the international community’s condemnation of their state and demand for its dissolution. So, the EU and UNDP provide money for sewage plants, waste treatment facilities, and other infrastructure in anticipation of a political solution that will dissolve the TRNC’s statehood. The EU encourages trade across a border that is not recognized as such, while requiring Turkish Cypriots to acknowledge the illegitimacy of their own ports and means of export. Turkish corporations invest in hotel complexes and bring global brands to the island, producing economic *faits accomplis* that also gradually push out the simulated brands and provide a perceived “realer” incorporation into the global economy. At the same time, these steps toward





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incorporation make Turkish Cypriots aware of the precariousness of their independence from their “patron.” The effect of these combined practices is like cracking open a previously closed door that makes citizens of northern Cyprus increasingly aware of their liminality, of the threshold that they cannot cross.

A loss of belief in their state’s sovereignty, however, does not seem to undermine its legitimacy as an institution for representing them. Certainly, the lack of accountability and the sense that any serious change must be put on hold for a “solution” have aided in creating a system rife with patronage and mismanagement. In the past decade in northern Cyprus, governments have been brought to power and overturned with frequency. The last parliamentary election in 2013 brought in a new young guard making promises to fix a broken system. But despite the open border, there have been neither mass defections to the island’s south nor calls to dissolve their “unreal” state. Turkish Cypriots’ disbelief in their own sovereignty appears to express, more than anything else, the ineffectiveness of their own political subjecthood, the inability to make their voices heard or determine their own future. This is sometimes expressed as grievance about unhealthy ties to their “patron,” and a loss of “political will.” Indeed, in the case examined here, the lack of belief in their sovereignty appears to express Turkish Cypriots’ sense that they have become unreal as citizens, only able to interact with the world in other guises.

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De facto states are small and marginal, but they tend to be located in strategically important areas, complicating resource extraction as well as these regions’ economic development.<sup>44</sup> While the loss of a belief in sovereignty might seem to bode well for resolving secessionism conflicts, this would only be the case if we assess such a crisis as one of legitimacy. I have suggested that rather than a *legitimacy crisis* de facto states face a *liminal crisis*, which by definition is a precariously unstable situation. The only way out of a liminal crisis is to have a clear goal, without which persons stuck in the ongoing crisis flounder and tend to follow whichever way the wind is blowing.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, the all-or-nothing, one-size-fits-all approach to sovereignty offers such states not a goal but a dream, one that appears to recede the more they try to grasp it.

## CONCLUSION: AN EXIT FROM LIMINALITY?

Today northern Cyprus is often used as a model for how engagement can lead to the improvement of material conditions and reduced tensions in separatist conflicts.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, while other states such as Kosovo and Abkhazia may receive recognition from more states, northern Cyprus is one of the de facto states with







the highest degree of “normalization,” if measured in terms of standard of living and democratic practice. Freedom House, for instance, regards northern Cyprus as “free” (along with Taiwan, it is one of only two de facto states to receive that ranking), citing “generally free and fair” elections, an independent judiciary, and rights of assembly and protest, among other criteria.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, per capita GDP grew from \$4,409 in 2002 to \$13,253 in 2009. Nevertheless, even as the entity’s relative isolation has cocooned it from the banking crisis in the Republic of Cyprus and recent turmoil in Turkey, there is much public discussion of the collapse, disappearance, or nonexistence of something that might be called a state.

Anthropologists and sociologists writing about extended liminality have described it as a condition of disorientation in which the previous order has broken down and the new, imagined order has yet to be established.<sup>48</sup> These transitional periods are unbalanced, often chaotic, and those stuck in such conditions search for leaders who will direct them. We see such political chaos in northern Cyprus today, where even previously staunch regime supporters acknowledge that the system established there was not sustainable, as it depended on exploitation of Greek Cypriot property and an entrenched nepotism with no concern for the future (since the future was still to be determined). One nationalist trade union leader commented, “We’ve become a community that’s just waiting for peace,” in which “peace” stands for a resolution of their current condition. That same trade union leader continued, “We fought to save ourselves but could not fight to establish ourselves”—in other words, to establish a system that functions and serves its citizens.<sup>49</sup>

I have suggested that Turkish Cypriots’ encounters with globalization and transnational institutions have put them in the position of consumers but not producers, of receivers of aid but not participants in a wider democratic process. One may “engage” with de facto states, but one may not hold them accountable. The threat of “tacit recognition” makes international engagement with de facto states timid, the political equivalent of a sideways glance. That sideways glance skirts over the system’s problems, refusing to demand accountability from a system that should be dissolved. Moreover, that lack of accountability has ultimately permeated the political culture in northern Cyprus and has led to a general perception that the state is in disarray, that something they might call a real state does not exist. In a series of 30 interviews conducted with Turkish Cypriot opinion-shapers in spring 2012, predictions for the next 10 years were especially dark. One businessman said, “If we don’t get our political life and state in some order, I think we’re going to be in a very bad place in ten years.”<sup>50</sup> A young leader of a leftist organization remarked, “I think that in general the






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situation is heading towards confusion. I see this situation as negative because people can't see the future when there's chaos and confusion."<sup>51</sup>

For observers of this and similar conflicts, the instability produced by extended liminality should be worrying because the results are unpredictable so long as there is no clear roadmap for the future. The middle position of "engagement without recognition" does not provide an answer because it does not require the active participation of de facto states' citizens in a future that they can create. In the same series of interviews with Turkish Cypriot opinion-shapers, one union leader criticized the EU policy of engagement: "If we evaluate the EU's presence here just in terms of infrastructural projects and restoration, then we can say there is such a presence. But if we ask about the EU's political presence or contribution to solving the Cyprus problem, we can say there basically is no presence, no contribution. In particular they've made no attempts to help us democratize within the EU framework."<sup>52</sup>

Northern Cyprus is an especially interesting case for looking at the consequences of long-term liminality, precisely because the past 10 years have witnessed both an opening to the world and a crisis of sovereignty. Moreover, that crisis does not seem likely to resolve itself in the near future as long as international actors' engagement with the north does not also include accountability. Holding actors accountable brings forth the specter of "tacit recognition"—the acknowledgment of a body that can act and be held responsible for its actions. While February 2014 saw the renewal of reunification negotiations and the rekindling of hope for a solution, negotiations have always been hampered by a refusal to think beyond an all-or-nothing future. The negotiation of a comprehensive solution—which would presumably change the status of the de facto state in one stroke of a pen—has been the international community's preference for all cases of secessionist states. I suggest that this preference is based on preconceptions about the indivisibility of sovereignty that are outdated in an era of globalization. In a world of "fragmented" or "disaggregated" sovereignty, perhaps piecemeal or step-by-step solutions can help us provide goals and responsibilities for unrecognized states, allowing their citizens to take a first step across the threshold that defines their liminality.<sup>53</sup> 

## NOTES

1. Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 6.

2. Michael R. Fowler and Julie Marie Buncke, *Law, Power, and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 12.

3. For example, see: Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Reunification and Identity in the German*



*Borderland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Richard Sakwa, "Liminality and Post-communism: The Twenty-First Century as the Subject of History," *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 110–26; Harald Wydra, *Continuities in Poland's Permanent Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

4. Caspersen, *Unrecognized States*, 101.

5. On the contradictions of de facto entities' state building, see: Caspersen, *Unrecognized States*, 77–101. For an assessment of degrees of state building in post-Soviet de facto states, see: Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-States," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (2008): 483–509.

6. Özgün Kutalmış, "Lütfen ciddi olalım," *Afrika*, November 9, 2011, 8; Rebecca Bryant, interview with small business owner in northern Cyprus, Nicosia, July 7, 2013.

7. *The Coconut Revolution*, directed by Dom Rotheroe (Stampede Films, 2000).

8. Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States," *World Politics* 53 (2001): 524–52.

9. James Harvey and Gareth Stansfield, "Theorizing unrecognized states: Sovereignty, secessionism, and political economy," in *Unrecognized States in the International System*, ed. Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield (New York: Routledge, 2011), 16.

10. Rebecca Bryant and Mete Hatay, "Guns and Guitars: Simulating Sovereignty in a State of Siege," *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 4 (2011): 631–49.

11. Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

12. Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 53.

13. Rebecca Bryant, *Displacement in Cyprus—Consequences of Civil and Military Strife, Report No. 2, Life Stories: Turkish Cypriot Community* (Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2012); Richard Patrick, *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict: 1963–1971*, ed. James H. Bater and Richard Press (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, Department of Geography Publication Series No. 4, 1976).

14. Dov Lynch calls de facto states "racketeer states" because the sense of threat from the "parent state" appears out of proportion and only cements compliance within the state. See: Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004), 59.

15. This is something that has been noted in passing by other authors. Dov Lynch remarked "economic isolation has only strengthened subsistence syndromes." See: Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States*, 64. Irakli Khintba also observed that isolation does not turn populations against political elites. See: Irakli Khintba, "De-isolation via the West: opportunities and restriction," *The De-Isolation of Abkhazia* (International Alert, April 2011), 19.

16. Rebecca Bryant, interview with European academic, Sukhumi, September 28, 2013.

17. While this was the government estimate in 2010, an International Crisis Group report for the same period asserted that a more reasonable population estimate would be around 30,000 people. See: *South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition*, International Crisis Group Europe Report no. 205 (June 7, 2010), 2.

18. Although a 2004 census put the population at around 670,000 people, a more recent estimate suggests that it may have declined to around 400,000. For the 2004 census, see: *Moldova: Regional Tensions over Transnistria*, International Crisis Group Report No. 157 (2004). For the more recent estimate, see: Nicu Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts: Stealth Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 39.

19. Caspersen, *Unrecognized States*, 101.

20. Rebecca Bryant, interview with civil society leader, Sukhumi, September 26, 2013.

21. Caspersen, *Unrecognized States*, 84.

22. The 2011 Abkhazia census showed 122,069 persons of Abkhaz ethnic origin out of a total population of 240,705. This was a sharp increase from 94,606 in 2003. For the list of Abkhazia censuses from 1886 to 2011, see: "Population of Abkhazia," Ethno-Kavaz, <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html> (in Russian). The Russian expulsion of Circassians from their homeland in 1864 resulted in a large Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey, Syria, and Jordan. Estimates of their population range from 500,000 to more



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than 2 million, but reliable estimates suggest that there are at least half a million Abkhaz in Turkey alone. On repatriation efforts, see: Inal Khashig, "Abkhazia Offers Citizenship to Diaspora," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, November 10, 2005; Elizabeth Owen, "Abkhazia's Diaspora: Dreaming of Home," Eurasianet.org, March 8, 2009; Ellen Barry, "Abkhazia Lures Its Expatriates, Welcoming Them One by One," *New York Times*, May 7, 2009.

23. Rebecca Bryant, interview with a Turkish member of the Abkhaz diaspora, Sukhumi, September 26, 2013.

24. International Crisis Group, *South Ossetia*, 5.

25. "Kıbrıs'ın zoru ne?" *Sendika.org*, March 1, 2011.

26. Burak Maviş, "Göç Yasası Nedir?" *Gazettedakavi* 2011, October 10, 2013.

27. Until 2003, the Republic of Cyprus recorded tourists crossing at checkpoints to the north and required that they return by 5:00 p.m. Because the Republic of Cyprus claimed that almost all tourist facilities in the island's north were either former Greek Cypriot properties or built on Greek Cypriot land, anyone wishing to stay overnight had to fly from Turkey to the "illegal" Ercan airport. After having arrived in this way into the north, crossing to the south was then prohibited. TRNC passports have only limited use, although some countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have made exceptions and given visas on these passports. For most travel, many Turkish Cypriots prior to 2003 also possessed a *laissez-passer* issued by the Turkish Republic, in other words a passport that did not confer citizenship. Turkish passports, however, are also encumbered by travel restrictions—and so in the past decade, after the RoC became an EU member in 2004, reportedly more than 100,000 Turkish Cypriots acquired RoC identity cards, which allow them to travel freely within Europe. An estimated half of those individuals have also acquired EU passports.

28. The relationship between the state in northern Cyprus and Turkey is multifaceted and cannot be addressed here. For a more detailed analysis, see: Rebecca Bryant and Christalla Yakinthou, *Cypriot Perceptions of Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2012).

29. Sami Özusu, "Belirsizlikler ülkesi," *Yenidüzen*, January 31, 2014.

30. Mary Douglas, "Seeing Everything in Black and White: The Origins of Sectarian Violence and the Problems of Small Groups," Semiotics Online Institute, 2006.

31. Kudret Özersay and Ayla Gürel, "Property and Human Rights in Cyprus: The European Court of Human Rights as a Platform of Political Struggle," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 291–321.

32. For details on this, see: Rebecca Bryant, "Of Lemons and Laws: Property and the (Trans)national Order in Cyprus," in *Waging War and Making Peace: Reparations and Human Rights*, ed. Barbara Rose Johnston and Susan Slyomovics (San Francisco: Left Coast Press, 2009), 217–34.

33. For analyses of this decision and its consequences, see: Rhodri C. Williams and Ayla Gürel, *The European Court of Human Rights and the Property Issue: Charting a way forward* (Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre Paper 1, 2011); Ani Vardanyan, "Requirement to Exhaust Domestic Remedies in De Facto Regimes Under Art. 35.1 of ECHR: Expansion of Namibia Exception" (Yerevan, Armenia: American University of Armenia, L.L.M. Program, 2008).

34. The European Commission webpage on the Turkish Cypriot community, for instance, explains, "The whole of the island is part of the EU. However, in the northern part of the island, in the areas in which the Government of Cyprus does not exercise effective control, EU legislation is suspended." See: "Representation in Cyprus," European Commission. The Republic of Cyprus's own Ministry of Foreign Affairs website calls the south "the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus." See: "Entry Regulations for Cyprus," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus.

35. Ali Osman, "Sevinin...", *Afrika*, January 27, 2010.

36. On "engagement without recognition" as a new diplomatic strategy, see: Alexander Cooley and Lincoln A. Mitchell, "Engagement without Recognition: A New Strategy toward Abkhazia and Eurasia's Unrecognized States," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2010): 59–73.

37. Rebecca Bryant, interview with Turkish Cypriot civil society leader, March 17, 2012.

38. For details on impediments to the implementation of the Green Line Regulation, see: Mete Hatay, Fiona Mullen, and Julia Kalimeri, *Intra-island trade in Cyprus: Obstacles, oppositions and psychological barriers* (Nicosia: PRIO Paper 2, 2008).



39. Casinos reportedly generate around \$75 million of tax revenue per year, while estimates put annual state revenue on brothels at around 20 million Turkish lira (around \$10 million). Betting offices are another source of revenue that apparently generate around 25 million Turkish lira (\$12 million) per year. All of these institutions are known to conduct much untaxed trade, however. These figures may be compared to the total export income for northern Cyprus, which is reportedly \$80 million. On casino tourism and a comparison with total exports, see: "Kumar turizmi ve KKTC'ye etkisi," Milliyet Blog, December 22, 2011. On the revenue from brothels (also known as "nightclubs"), see: Fehim Taştekin, "Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın 'malum sırları': Fuhuş ve kadın ticareti," Al-Monitor.com, October 9, 2013. The estimate for betting office revenue may be found at: Emine Tahsin, "Casinolar ile bitmiyor," soL Haber Portalı, Nov. 2, 2010.

40. Rebecca Bryant, interview with Turkish Cypriot trade union leader, March 3, 2012.

41. International Crisis Group, *South Ossetia*.

42. One Turkish Cypriot civil society representative explained that he had been invited to conferences in both Armenia and Moldova to explain the "northern Cyprus model" to civil society partners in those countries who are seeking new ways to think about their own secessionist entities.

43. For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between northern Cyprus and Turkey, see: Rebecca Bryant and Christalla Yakinthou, *Cypriot Perceptions of Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2012).

44. For an overview of the critical role of northern Cyprus in hydrocarbon extraction in the Eastern Mediterranean, see: Ayla Gürel, Fiona Mullen, and Harry Tzimitras, *The Cyprus Hydrocarbons Issue: Context, Positions, and Future Scenarios* (Nicosia: PRIO Paper 1, 2013).

45. See: Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969). For observations on the wider applicability of liminality as a concept, see: Bjorn Thomassen, "Uses and meanings of liminality," *International Political Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2009): 5–28.

46. Rebecca Bryant, interview with union leader, Nicosia, April 15, 2012.

47. "Northern Cyprus: Freedom in the World 2013," Freedom House.

48. The authors of liminality theory, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, focused primarily on ritual. See: Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Aldine Transaction, 1969).

49. Rebecca Bryant, interview with trade union leader, Nicosia, April 21, 2012.

50. Rebecca Bryant, interview with businessman, Nicosia, May 5, 2012.

51. Rebecca Bryant, interview with leftist organization leader, Nicosia, March 18, 2012.

52. Rebecca Bryant, interview with union leader, Nicosia, March 13, 2012.

53. On fragmented sovereignty, see: Henrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On disaggregated sovereignty, see: Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Disaggregated Sovereignty: Toward the Public Accountability of Global Government Networks," *Government and Opposition* 39 (2004): 159–90.