

The Nature of Separatism and Its Weak Reverberations in the Americas

JAUME CASTAN PINOS

Abstract *Secessionism opens up a myriad of interesting debates related to the very ontology of borders and states and the nature of the international system. The main aim of this study is to shed light on the under-scrutinised phenomenon of separatism by problematising and theorising on it. To this end, I attempt to explain the socio-economic and political conditions and environments that favour the development of separatism, elucidating the argument with historical and contemporary examples of secessionism. The relationships between secessionism and the principles of territorial integrity, self-determination and legitimacy are also explored. The third of these principles is of particular significance since it holds that not all cases of secession enjoy the same degree of legitimacy. I show that the debate on the legitimacy of secessions is rich, passionate and very often controversial, with contributors ranging from legal scholars, who adhere uncritically to the principle of territorial integrity, to those who recognise an entitlement to secede based on ascriptive and even associative rights. The final part of this work is dedicated to assessing the impact of separatism on the American continent. In theory, this region is the least affected by secessionist challenges. Nevertheless, I argue that despite their weak reverberations in quantitative terms, such phenomena still play a very significant role, and there is plenty of potential for the generating of conflicts of a secessionist nature in the foreseeable future.*

Keywords: secession, self-determination, state, encompassing groups, legitimacy, the Americas

Introduction

Despite the catastrophes predicted by some scholars and visionary policy-makers over past decades, states have not disappeared. They have undoubtedly been transformed and their scope for political and particularly economic manoeuvring limited by numerous factors including systemic constraints and interactions with non-state actors. However, for all the constraints and competition, it must be acknowledged that, as O'Dowd claims, we continue to live in a world of states and, as a result, the so-called era of nation states is far from over.¹ This initial clarification is of vital importance for if we decide to pronounce the death of the nation state, we will not be able to understand the phenomenon of separatism and its complex relationship with not only the institution of the state but also fundamental principles of international relations such as self-determination and territorial integrity. The proliferation of separatism in different regions of the globe indicates that, like states and national borders, it has not disappeared with globalisation.

In theory, all nation states are vulnerable and susceptible to separatist challenges and consequently to the violation of their territorial integrity. However, the distribution of secessionist conflicts is geographically differentiated: some regions such as Asia and Europe are more affected than others. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research has concluded that secession was the main cause of 52 recorded conflicts worldwide in 2014; 20 took place in Asia and Oceania, 15 in Europe, 10 in Sub-Saharan Africa and 6 in the Middle East and North Africa and only 1 was identified in the Americas.² It is crucial to highlight that the potential for secession does not always lead to its eventuality.

The year 2014 produced numerous secessionist disputes and it is worth noting that even though all separatist movements share the goal of creating an independent political entity, their causes, nature and *modus operandi* may vary significantly. For instance, the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine is significantly different from the consensual referendum in Scotland and the institutional dispute (fuelled also by civil society organisations) in Catalonia between the Spanish central government and the regional government. A European reader may be well-acquainted with those cases but perhaps not so familiar with the situation in Mizoram and Manipur in northern India, Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, Cabinda in Angola or Biafra in Nigeria.

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As stated above, in the Americas, the presence of this challenge to states is more limited. The Heidelberg study lists the single case of Easter Island, which is under Chilean sovereignty. The last section of this study will concentrate on this region with the aim of understanding the extent of separatism in the Americas, its manifestations and the reasons for its weak reverberations across the “new continent.” Secessionism is a global, or at least a quasi-global, phenomenon whose real significance is perhaps not well-represented in terms of academic publications. This work attempts to fill this gap by illuminating the conditions and factors that trigger or indeed deter one of the greatest challenges for contemporary nation states.

A Note on Territorial Integrity

The conflict between territorial integrity and self-determination is an unavoidable theme for those trying to analyse secessionism. It has been argued that rather than being polar opposites, the former principle accommodates the latter and consequently the two, if understood properly, work in tandem.³ However, these principles can be contradictory, leading to endless discussions where international law becomes a fertile arena for political quarrels with its doctrines being invoked by those keen to secede as well as those aiming to preserve the territorial *status quo*. This section attempts to problematise the principle of territorial integrity.

Territorial integrity is undeniably a fundamental pillar of international law and international relations. This principle relates to the safeguarding of inviolable state boundaries and has a double purpose: on the one hand, it protects national borders against other states, and on the other, it has an intra-state dimension according to which states have the right to protect the violability of their borders from within, that is, from separatism.⁴ It is important not to forget here that the aim of separatists is to redraw existing political boundaries.

It is often argued that 1945 represented a turning point for this principle in terms of its legal consolidation. This was the year when, for instance, it was stipulated in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter that “[a]ll Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”⁵ Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that a few decades earlier, Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations

had already guaranteed the preservation and respect of the territorial integrity of states.⁶

It is common practice for state governments to ensure that the norm of territorial integrity is enshrined in their declarations and legal texts. As a result, it is unsurprising that intergovernmental Organisations such as the African Union, the Arab League, the European Union and the Organization of American States include this principle in their founding treaties and charters. Legal fortresses are, however, not the only strategy that may be deployed to protect this norm. Interestingly, as Weller points out, pragmatic *technical* solutions may also be used, with power-sharing or self-governing units being installed to appease secessionist impulses.⁷ The Dayton Agreement in Bosnia is a paradigmatic example of the (over-)generous recognition of a self-governing unit, particularly on the Bosnian-Serb side, with the aim of safeguarding the continuity of the border and, as such, the very survival of Bosnia as a state.

The main justification for territorial integrity stems from a statement issued by former US president Dwight D. Eisenhower in the context of the Suez Canal crisis: ‘There can be no peace – without law. And there can be no law – if we were to invoke one code of international conduct for those who oppose us – and another for our friends.’⁸ The territorial integrity concept indeed attempts to regulate one of the primary threats to peace in the international system: territorial disputes. Eisenhower’s assertion, while not directly connected to the norm, provides us with another important clue from which we can extrapolate the principle of territorial integrity: all states, whether friends or foes, have a right, at least *a priori*, to protect the inviolability of their external borders.

However, in order to understand the idiosyncrasies of territorial integrity and, more specifically, its relationship with self-determination, it is essential to consider United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625, ‘Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States,’ adopted on 24 October 1970. A paragraph at the end of the declaration is particularly useful for our discussion:

Nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting

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themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour.

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This text is of paramount importance since, to put it simply, it sets out the rules of the game. The first two lines establish that territorial integrity takes precedence over self-determination. At the same time, the second part of the paragraph states more or less implicitly that the right to territorial integrity ceases to be valid if a state does not respect the rights of its own citizens. This opens the door to vital questions: What happens if a state does not comply with the principle of equal rights? Does this necessarily legitimise a secessionist claim? In order to solve this conundrum, we should shed some light on the legitimacy of different secessionist claims.

One Phenomenon, Different Grades of Legitimacy

Before addressing any questions related to the legitimacy of secessionist claims, it is necessary to state the obvious: not all cases of secession are equally legitimate (or illegitimate). As such, some kind of hierarchy of legitimacy can be established concerning separatism. Drawing inspiration from Allen Buchanan, one of the most prominent scholars on the subject of self-determination and the legitimacy of secession,⁹ I divide these claims into three categories: legitimate cases, cases of remedial rights and cases of primary rights.

There are two specific cases when secession is considered overwhelmingly legitimate. Classic forms of de-colonisation where an overseas colony attempts to liberate itself from an occupying power are one such case. Currently, however, no state falls in this category. The second situation where secession is deemed fully legitimate is when it is not unilateral but the result of a consensual and negotiated process, in other words, when the encompassing state has allowed the secession of part of its territory. Several historical examples can be found of where this has occurred. Norway's independence from Sweden in 1905 is considered to be an exemplary case of negotiated secession. Nevertheless, this view ignores the fact that Norway had attempted to secede unilaterally in June 1905 when its parliament issued a unilateral declaration of independence that was rejected by the Swedish government. The rejection was followed by a demand from Stockholm

for a referendum as a *sine qua non* condition for secession. That plebiscite took place on 08 August and resulted in a landslide victory for proponents of breaking up the union, paving the way for a negotiated settlement a few weeks later.¹⁰ Similar cases include the negotiated dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic on 01 January 1993, the independence of Montenegro from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 and the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Had the Scottish referendum of September 2014 ultimately favoured independence, this would also have constituted a legitimate case because of the agreement of both parties involved. It must be noted that in the cases listed above, there is no question as to whether or not they are legitimate. Even the most irredentist advocates of territorial integrity accept the validity of such secessions.

However, such universal agreement about the legitimacy of secession ends here. The controversy begins with the issue of remedial rights. The backbone of a remedial right is its moral nature. Buchanan defines this as a ‘right to a remedy of last resort against serious and persistent injustices.’¹¹ Seymour emphasises the restrictive nature of remedial theories in the sense that ‘secession can only be justified if important harms have been caused to the seceding group by the encompassing state’¹²; even then, remedial rights should only be applied in very specific cases where there is no viable alternative. Remedial rights apply in a wide range of situations from the illegal annexation of a territory to massive violations of human rights and the violation of intra-state agreements, and finally, where there is discrimination by the encompassing state in terms of resource redistribution.

There are several problems associated with remedial rights and they are the subject of polemics. Perhaps the most significant issue concerns the double standards that these rights tend to attract. For instance, the violations of ethnic Albanians’ human rights that were perpetrated by Yugoslavian forces are often considered to be the driving force behind Kosovan statehood. However, similar cases (such as Kurdistan), where states have violated the human rights of citizens from stateless nations, have not resulted in independent political entities.¹³ In addition, we may ask what happens when, as in the case of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which targeted Serbian and Albanian civilians accused of collaboration, secessionist groups are also responsible for human rights atrocities? Does this exclude them from the right to statehood based on moral grounds?

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These questions highlight one of the chief problems with remedial rights: they entail a risk of simplifying complex conflicts and interpreting them in Manichean terms where one party is perceived as the aggressor and the other as the victim. The inescapable tragedy for analysts is that the dynamics of conflicts are on many occasions open to interpretation. Likewise, the violation of intra-state agreements cannot always be blamed on either the encompassing state or pro-autonomy groups; rather the problem lies in the conflict-related dynamics established between the different parties. The case of Kosovo once again provides us with a useful illustration. While the [Independent International Commission on Kosovo](#) concluded that Slobodan Milošević's administration had revoked Kosovo's autonomy in 1989 as part of an ulterior plan to create an apartheid state,¹⁴ others interpret the same revocation as the logical (and necessary) consequence of avoiding the creation of an ethnically pure (Albanian) independent Kosovo.¹⁵ The last cause for remedial rights, resource redistribution discrimination, is even more complicated to ascertain and, as a result, more vulnerable to clashing narratives.

The final category, primary rights, is based on a view of secession as a right of certain collectives that fulfil a number of conditions. In other words, there is a belief that certain groups are entitled to secede without the consent of the state even in the absence of injustice or moral hazard. As may be guessed, this category is by far the least accepted among academics and also the most threatening to nation states. Primary rights can be sub-divided into two distinct groups: ascriptive and associative rights.

Simply put, proponents of ascriptive rights claim that a group is entitled to secede from an encompassing state if it constitutes what Margalit and Raz define as an 'encompassing group'.¹⁶ Such a group has a common culture, history, language and awareness of distinct non-political attributes. There are numerous difficulties linked to ascriptive rights. The category raises a number of questions. For example, which groups constitute an encompassing group? How different should their language or history be? All too often, national boundaries are not as clear-cut as some secessionist groups (or indeed nation states) would wish. Even if we could find a comprehensive answer to the above questions, we would still meet with plenty of loose ends. What about minorities within minorities? And what if a minority group is connected to the encompassing state? Do they then have the right to secede from

the newly formed state? It may be argued that if the right to secede were recognised for all stateless nations/encompassing groups, this would open the gates to a proliferation of secessions and so might jeopardise the order of the international system. Pavković and Radan's critique of ascriptive rights puts the nail in the coffin; why, they ask, do the 'non-political attributes of a group require the establishment of separate coercive and legal institutions [...] which this non-political group should exclusively control [?]'¹⁷ It appears, then, that ascriptive rights generate questions more than they clarify answers.

Finally, associative rights are connected to individual empowerment and an ontological distrust of coercive institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of individuals. The rationale behind this approach is the liberal idea that 'a state is justified only if the citizens have consented to it.'¹⁸ Associative rights advocates, unlike their ascriptive counterparts, hold that there is no need for the potentially seceding group to have any common connection, either historical or imagined, with the territory they aim to make into their own independent state. They need not constitute an encompassing group since all that is required is that they have the will to become an independent political entity and consent to doing so. According to Wellman 'any group may secede as long as it and its remainder state are large, wealthy, cohesive, and geographically contiguous enough to form a government that effectively performs the functions necessary to create a secure political environment.'¹⁹ This controversial assertion, deeply embedded in US libertarian theories, perfectly summarises the associative right to statehood.

Whether we feel appalled or attracted intellectually by these different justifications for secession, the fact of the matter is that separatism occurs. It is therefore imperative that we turn our attention to the roots of the phenomenon so that we can a greater understanding of it.

Delving into the Conditions for Separatism

One of the first scholars to theorise secessionism was the Canadian political scientist John Wood. He defined the term as 'an instance of political disintegration wherein political actors in one or more sub-systems withdraw their loyalties, expectations, and political activities from a jurisdictional centre and focus them on a centre of their own.'²⁰ This definition closely resembles Ladis Kristof's claim that the territorial integrity of a state is under threat when the socio-political body is not able to generate loyalties or, put more simply, when the *centrifugal*

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forces have outweighed the *centripetal* ones.²¹

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Separatism, therefore, can be understood as the existence within a state of a group that aims to establish a new independent political authority in part of the host state's territory. As suggested in the introduction to this study, and bearing in mind the above definitions, separatism has the potential to affect most, if not all, states. However, it is important to note that certain conditions will favour – or alternatively deter – its emergence and development.

Before these conditions, however, there are also certain preconditions that are needed for secessionism to flourish. Perhaps the first and most essential precondition is the existence of cultural, ethnic and religious differences within the central power. The existence of these differences does not necessarily lead to secessionist claims but can be seen as a potential catalyst. The potential for secessionism grows exponentially if the encompassing group, to use Margalit and Raz's terminology, becomes alienated from the host state²² and begins to conceptualise its relationship with the central government in terms of binary oppositions. As Wood points out, ethnic identities are political artefacts, and as such, they are prone to manipulation by either secessionist groups or central governments.²³ At any rate, a decrease in the central government's legitimacy constitutes a political precondition for secession.

In relation to this point, economic grievances may contribute to the radicalisation of a regionalist/cultural movement so that it withdraws its loyalties and becomes more alienated towards the host state. In the Catalan case, for instance, the claim that “our €16 billion” never returned from Madrid as a result of the Spanish system of tax revenue-sharing provided the pro-independence movement with a powerful narrative under which secession appeared to be the only way to avoid economic discrimination. It must be noted that the unwillingness of successive Spanish governments to negotiate the tax revenue system was fundamental to this narrative's success. Rather than this being an isolated case, we find economic grievances present in multiple secessionist narratives such as those in Slovenia and Croatia in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively and indeed among British colonists in the 13 American colonies of the mid-18th century. Finally, Wood identifies certain psychological preconditions that stimulate all of the above preconditions in the form of emotional appeals for independence to protect threatened languages, honour martyrs, etc.

In addition to these preconditions, we can recognise a number of conditions related to the central government. An enduring economic crisis may trigger the consolidation of anti-centralist movements or radicalise regionalist movements leading to polarisation. Economic instability may be accompanied by political turmoil and a lack of legitimacy of the central government. This is, indeed, a central element that facilitates the consolidation of secessionists; it may be used to mount an argument in support of anti-centralist discourse along the lines of “we told you so; this country does not work at any level. There is no solution but to separate.” The responses of the central government are also fundamental and may be either coercive or accommodating. The tragedy is that there is no recipe for success here, and both these stances can be counterproductive. The British government has, for example, pursued an accommodating policy towards Scotland through devolution over the past few decades. Despite the results of the 2014 referendum, support for independence has been growing gradually and the Scottish National Party (SNP) has consolidated itself as the country’s major political force partly due to devolution. On the other hand, an iron fist approach may lead to the same results. In the early 1960s, the French government was able to defeat the Algerian National Liberation Front, but far from consolidating its sovereignty over Algeria, that victory and the brutality of the French repression paradoxically contributed to Algeria’s eventual independence. Perhaps, then, we may conclude that the final outcome is subject to another factor of paramount significance: the interaction between the different actors.

Needless to say, the fortunes of secessionists will also depend on their capacity to organise and galvanise support from the population they aim to liberate. It will therefore be essential for them to construct a powerful counter-hegemonic narrative that manages to channel people’s discontent. Wood refers to this work as political entrepreneurship in the sense that a secessionist group exploits existing cleavages ‘and fans the flames of discontent’ to advance its agenda.²⁴ He distinguishes this political entrepreneurship from ideology. However, this is not so clear-cut since the aims of secessionists are similar in many ways to those of ideologies. Malcolm Hamilton has defined ideology as ‘a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or

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maintain.²⁵ While we may acknowledge that a secessionist movement does not entirely amount to an ideology, if we bear in mind Hamilton's definition, then we can observe certain resemblances including the reliance on normative beliefs, advocating of particular arrangements and justifying of a particular pattern of conduct. Furthermore, in electoral contests, a secessionist project may be used to gather support and promise a better life to the citizens of a particular territory in a manner that resembles the way that classic ideologies are instrumentalised by political parties.

Finally, there are two factors that are often neglected by secession scholars and can be categorised as external. The regional context is of fundamental significance because it creates synergies or a domino effect that may provide an impulse for those advocating separation. The domino effect's importance is illustrated in multiple historical examples including the independence of the Spanish colonies in Latin America in the early 19th century, de-colonisation in Asia and Africa after the Second World War and events in the former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union in more recent years. Simply put, once the genie is out of the bottle, the probability of achieving independence increases. The other external condition is the role played by external powers which support particular processes of independence. This is not exceptional but rather common, and there are numerous examples, both historical and contemporary, of foreign support. In the Americas, we find an exemplary case in the active role played by the US in supporting the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico from the Spanish Kingdom in 1898.

This section has scrutinised the different preconditions and conditions that may lead to the secession of a territory from an encompassing state. On this basis, we may tentatively assert that a single condition is generally not sufficient, but not all conditions are necessary for the occurrence of secession, and these conditions may not happen simultaneously in a single case. The combination of these conditions and preconditions is, moreover, likely to vary from case to case.

Separatism in the Americas

Having approached the separatism phenomenon through a mostly theoretical lens, it is now time to add a more empirical dimension to our inquiry. I wish to concentrate on the Americas and so attempt to cast some light on the presence of secessionism on this continent. The

grounds for this choice of region may not appear self-evident. When we think of conflicts of a separatist nature, then outside the examples of Quebec or Easter Island, we generally think not of the Americas but of other regions such as Europe, Africa and Asia. As was mentioned in the introduction, a study of global political conflicts conducted by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research identified only one case of secessionism, that of Easter Island or Rapa Nui, in the Americas. It is therefore necessary to dig deeper and analyse the details that cold quantitative data tend to obscure. Indeed, an initial passing glance at the Americas would lead us to conclude that they are practically immune from the phenomenon that we have explored throughout this study. A closer look, however, shows that secessionist problems have a significant presence in the region.

It would be over-ambitious to attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation here for separatism's lower impact in the Americas compared with other continents. This would undoubtedly be a terrific niche for future research. The aim of this final section is instead to provide some food for thought along with issues for discussion and foundations for future research on the subject. In order to advance these goals, I concentrate on three different factors that we may see as potential sources of separatism: indigenism, Quebec and anarcho-capitalism.

Indigenism is an element that is practically irrelevant in Europe (with the exception of northern Scandinavia) but extremely important in the Americas. Indigenism has a close relationship with self-determination, albeit based on an understanding of this principle that is not necessarily associated with the right to secede. As Jackson and Warren have claimed, some radical groups speak in terms of separatism, but most indigenous organisations see self-determination as a way to achieve fairer political representation in the existing system.²⁶ This idea has, in fact, already been developed by secessionism theorists, who claim that if we take a broad understanding of self-determination, we may view it as connected not only with secession but with the right to political participation in the decision-making of the host state.²⁷ Secessionism, therefore, represents one side of the coin of self-determination but it is not the only one.²⁸

A connection between local (ethnic) and national (state) identity is fundamental for the prevention of separatist tendencies among local groups. This is also the case for indigenous groups. If the indigenous

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group's culture is accommodated in the national discourse, the likelihood of secessionist trends will be drastically reduced. Such a bond seems to prevail, for instance, among Mexico's indigenous guerrillas, of whom the Zapatistas Army of National Liberation (EZLN) are one of the most significant instances. Cultural anthropologist Lynn Stephen has illustrated this bond through an example from 1996 when Comandante Ramona (EZLN) honoured the Mexican flag, declaring solemnly before several hundred indigenous leaders that 'this [flag] is so that they never forget that Mexico is our *patria* [native land] and so that everyone recognizes that there will never be a Mexico without us.'²⁹ This sentence has vital importance for many reasons. To begin with, it shows us that the (armed) indigenous group embraces Mexican symbols and pledges allegiance to the state. More importantly, it implies that the bond between the group and the nation state is so remarkable that Mexico cannot be conceived of without its indigenous peoples.

Similar conclusions can be drawn based on the declarations of EZLN leader Subcomandante insurgente Marcos,³⁰ who has often encouraged all Mexicans (whether indigenous or not) 'to participate in a new era of the national liberation struggle and for the construction of a new *patria*.'³¹ It must be noted that this 'new *patria*' refers to a Mexico-wide project based on democracy, freedoms and indigenous rights. There is an interesting lesson to be learned regarding separatism from the Zapatista example. It appears that the extent of the cultural or ethnic gaps between a particular group and the majority/dominant culture is less important than the degree to which non-hegemonic groups assume hegemonic symbols as their own. In other words, cultural differences *per se* are not the decisive factor that leads to separatism. The key element is the political production of these differences.

The second potential source of separatism in the Americas is Quebec. This predominantly French-speaking Canadian province has held two referenda on independence (in 1980 and 1995), both of which failed to gather enough popular support for that notion.³² These two successive rejections have had political consequences for the pro-secession movement in this Canadian province, particularly after the dramatic defeat of 1995. Different reasons may explain the failure of secessionists in the Quebec referenda. One potential explanation relates to the difficulty of winning secessionist referenda in well-established liberal democracies. As Dion points out, a pro-independence referendum has never been won in a consolidated democracy.³³ Another plausible cause

is the party system in Quebec and Canada. As Lawrence Anderson notes, the presence of a strong federalist nationalist party (Parti Libéral du Québec) gives Quebec voters an option that satisfies their nationalist impulses and, at the same time, reduces the uncertainties that could potentially generate secession.³⁴ Finally, it would appear that the accommodating strategy of the Canadian government, like that of its British counterparts in relation to Scotland, has been detrimental to the interests of the secessionist movement.

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The latest Quebec general elections, held in 2014, show that the two parties that favour independence enjoy the support of approximately one-third of voters in the province. The most important representative of the pro-independence movement, Parti Québécoise, has recently suffered some significant electoral defeats. In spite of these losses and the outcome of the two previous referenda, the party's primary objective continues to be creating a sovereign state through a popular referendum.³⁵ Quebec, therefore, remains a territory where secessionism exists without secession.

Lastly, the US continues to face its own internal secessionist challenges. The latest and perhaps most notorious of these surfaced in 2012 when the Texas Nationalist Movement organised the posting of 125,746 signatures of persons demanding secession on the White House website. It must be said that far from being a novelty, the right to secession is deeply rooted in US history. Christopher Wellman reminds us, for instance, that the so-called American Revolution cannot actually be considered a revolution since its goal was never to overthrow the British government, but to end their authority over the colonies.³⁶ This is, indeed, a textbook example of the objectives of a secessionist – and not a revolutionary – movement. Similarly, one of the most important chapters in US history, the civil war, was greatly influenced by secession since the unilateral declaration of independence of seven southern states lay at the core of the conflict. In more recent times, secessionism in the United States has been linked to a particular ideology: libertarianism or anarcho-capitalism. Anarcho-capitalists believe in the free association of land-owning individuals in a minimal state whose role is reduced to settling internal disputes and providing security. According to this associative vision, state borders could change continuously and depend exclusively on their legitimacy and the consent of the citizens living in a particular territory. As Pavković argues, two principles create the rationale for any secession according to anarcho-capitalist

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postulates: liberty and property.³⁷ Thus, secession is derived from the liberal rights to free political association and private property. These ideas significantly influence the Texan and other prominent secessionist movements in the United States. To a certain extent, it may be said that the US case has unique elements since the fate of secessionism is not really associated with the presence of ethnic or cultural diversity; rather, it is linked to the success of an ideology.

Concluding Remarks

Separatism is not a new phenomenon, but one that is perhaps as old as states and territorial integrity themselves. It is a phenomenon with multi-faceted causes. As such, secessionism is a crucial concern not only for states but also for scholars. Moreover, while the field is expanding, there is plenty of room for growth as the importance outweighs the quantity of academic literature published thus far. Theorists agree that certain factors lead to separatism but disagree about which factors they are and whether or not we can predict future cases on this basis. This may well be connected to the old positivism vs. anti-positivism debate in the social sciences.

Disagreements also emerge when we turn to the legitimacy of secession. Outside cases of de-colonisation and agreed secession, the debate on the legitimacy of secessions remains open and is probably highly dependent on theoretical considerations, affiliations and personal preferences. The aim of this study has not been to engage in such debates about the legitimacy of different secessions but to highlight their existence as well as the importance of these discussions and of the principles of international law such as territorial integrity and self-determination which underpin them.

Conflicts of a secessionist nature are increasing in number and in importance. As a result, separatism should also be seen as a geopolitical phenomenon. This is one specific research direction for future studies. Separatism's significance as a global phenomenon derives from several factors. It is, as I have discussed, a challenge for nation states. But it also presents an opportunity for states and a subtle and powerful foreign policy instrument that can be used – through covert actions, for instance – to weaken fellow states.

Another research direction which I have introduced relates to the different types of secessionism in the Americas. The current study should be viewed as an invitation or trigger to encourage further explo-

ration of the topic. As I have shown, the continent offers a wide range of under-researched secessionist (and quasi-secessionist) contexts that deserve further analysis and academic contributions. It seems clear that secessionism will continue to challenge states in the Americas and beyond, generating instability and, in some cases, redrawing state borders. Though the task may be daunting, academia should be prepared to live up to these challenges.

JAUME CASTAN PINOS is affiliated to the Department of Border Region Studies at the University of Southern Denmark and may be reached at: jaume@sam.sdu.dk

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Jaume
Castan
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