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Introduction
Territorial separatism in context

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One of the most striking patterns in the study of contemporary international conflict, particularly since the end of the Cold War, is the increasing pervasiveness of territorial claims by minority groups as a means of dealing with perceived or real collective injustices. In addition, over the last three decades, the United States and the USSR/Russia have increasingly abandoned client states, thus the support mechanisms that were often available to regimes facing separatist dissent have been reduced or disappeared. This weakening of international support for governments of sometimes doubtful territorial legitimacy has given fresh impetus to the widespread and deepening challenge of separatism (Armitage 2007; Bartkus 1999; Bessinger 2002; Heraclides 1991; Horowitz 1985; Lake and Rothschild 1998; Spencer 1998). As a result, there are numerous separatist movements throughout the world, dozens of which remain engaged in armed conflict aiming at the creation of new, independent states.

While once predominant forms of warfare were interstate and then wars of decolonization, separatist wars have continued to devolve outstanding politico-spatial, ethnic, economic and historic grievances. Separatist wars are often bloody, usually protracted and exact a price from participants that, proportionally, is often well in excess of their potential benefit. Such wars are often considered as intrastate wars as they occur within internationally recognized states. Moreover, since not all separatist wars seek to change the government of the state, many may be considered as civil wars, particularly where such war is classified as being between two organized armies within the same state, with high levels of intensity, sustainability and organization. To illustrate, the American Civil War, the Nigerian Civil War and Sri Lanka’s Eelam Wars can be considered as clear examples of separatist wars also being understood as civil wars. Yet, it is worth noting that whereas most civil wars intend to replace the central government, they can be limited in their aims to changing policies, such as determining the territory within the state.

Despite their violence, destructiveness and, commonly, lack of success, separatist wars not just continue, but multiply, presenting the greatest challenge to the post-World War II state system that has otherwise taken for granted the territorial integrity of states. The permanency of states, never an historical given, is under challenge once more, with the potential to redraw the boundaries as well
as the economic and strategic interests of substantial parts of the world. However, states as we have come to understand them do appear to be a permanent feature of international relations; they are reified by the UN Charter (1945 art. 2, par. 4) and, with very few exceptions, regard themselves not only as territorially sovereign, but, also, as exclusive and indivisible (Newton 2005).

The modern sense of sovereignty and indivisibility of states evolved historically in Europe, albeit not in a linear or causal fashion, through a gradual transformation of the notion of political community and its relation to territory (Hall 1999; Krasner 1993, 1995–6; Teschke 2003). Where once the distinction between polities had been fluid, changeable and often vague, modern state sovereignty was confirmed within hard, fixed and specific territorial borders (Elden 2013, pp. 279–321). In negotiating and defining such borders, the emerging national collective identity of the sovereign people problematized diverse notions of minority identity and, thus, numerous groups of people otherwise unaligned with the ‘sovereign’ were incorporated, willingly or unwillingly, within specific territorial demarcations (Hall 1999, pp. 132–171; Tilly 1993). This, of course, is not to say that European state borders remained permanently unaltered but rather that states were to be defined, in the first instance, by the institutionalization of sovereign authority, be that invested in their people or otherwise. In most cases the crystallization of statist national identities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries alleviated strong elements of difference within states. Statism contributed to the gradual establishment of common language groups and cultures, and a sense of identity increasingly defined as ‘nation’ emerged (Mann 1993, pp. 571–590). There was then, broadly, a confluence between the people as a bonded political group and the territory they claimed as representing their institutionalized interests. Such states were very largely inclusive; people and their territory were amalgamated in states often regardless of their preferences and the fact that once a people and their territory had been included within a state, almost by definition, the state worked to maintain its demographic and territorial coherence through exclusive sovereignty. The exclusivity of sovereignty is, however, qualified by the question of the legitimacy of the government or, in terms of separatist claims, the legitimacy of the state. By definition, separatist organizations do not regard the state from which they wish to separate as legitimate, either in total or in relation to the specific territory which they wish to establish as separate. Thus, the ground for regionalized dissent was established along with statism.

The normative basis for territorial separatism is the principle of self-determination which in essence reifies the division of the world into states whose peoples are characterized by an actual, a claimed or a constructed national identity. As a principle for world order, self-determination was the product of two competing agendas in the second half of the nineteenth century and again towards the end of World War I. Following the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, Bolshevik ideology promoted the notion of national self-determination as a right of secession from imperial rule intended to bolster the anti-imperialist left in Europe rather than the peoples of the colonies. On the other hand, the US President Woodrow Wilson (1918), coming from a liberal perspective, repeatedly talked about the need for a post-war settlement based on ‘the consent of the people,’ making the idea of self-determination relevant mainly to the defeated European powers (Manela 2007, pp. 127–128). Nevertheless, in the period following World War I, the rhetoric of self-determination was adopted by colonized peoples around the world whose growing national aspirations were formulated as claims against their rulers. The era of colonialism, largely concluding in the second half of the twentieth century, carved out territories across the globe that were to become independent modern states similar to those that evolved in Europe. Yet, as with and perhaps greater than Europe’s experience, colonized peoples who felt a questionable sense of affinity with their colonial masters were subsequently included in the post-colonial states.

After the end of World War II the right to self-determination was incorporated in the UN Charter and became part of the international legal arsenal of the decolonization movement (Crawford 2006, pp. 107–131). But in former colonies, usually demarcated according to administrative convenience rather than based on local forms of group identity, under the principle of uti possidetis, peoples who had once had little to do with each other or who were, in some instances, historical enemies, found themselves as citizens of the same state (e.g., see Chapter 8 on Cyprus). The narrow interpretation of self-determination as a legal norm by the UN deprived several groups from pursuing their claims peacefully within the boundaries of international law and, thus, it laid the grounds for territorial separatism (Tomuschat 2006). The reluctance by international community to (re-)define the content of self-determination in a decolonized world led to a number of inconsistent and ad hoc interpretations of the principle generating legal and political confusion (Chapter 2 in this volume is an example of this phenomenon). Consequent separatist conflicts now constitute one of the biggest challenges to global peace and security. These conflicts frequently manifest as high levels of collective violence and human rights abuse, both by separatist organizations and, more commonly, the states that seek to oppress their claims (Caplan 2005; Doyle 2010; Pavković and Radan 2008; Roeder 2007; Walter 2009; Weller and Wolff 2005).

The direct claim to territorial control that separatist conflicts make is a sine qua non condition for existence and survival in international politics (Buza 1991; Holsti 1996; Toft 2003). Usually cloaked under the discourse of nationalism and ethnic identity, separatist movements and states alike associate their identity with a particular territory or ‘homeland’ which secures their survival (Kubo 2011; Kingsbury 2007, pp. 36–77). This phenomenon echoes the way the international state system operates; by exercising control over territory states protect their people from coercion and foreign occupation. In order to address a grievance based on their collective identity and common territory political communities in many cases believe that they need to obtain the status of an independent state and enjoy recognition by the international community. There is, then, a paradox in the logic embedded in the current model of
independent states: the state is designed to preserve its territorial integrity and hence oppose its break-up, but communities that seek to separate in turn wish to establish another sovereign state. Therefore, independence, territorial sovereignty and international recognition are seen to be the conditions that can overcome the shortcomings that the political community experiences under the pre-existing state.

Beyond the immediate issues of territorial cohesion, external involvement in separatist struggles has been common practice for separatist (and other violent non-state) organizations. Third party intervention can be multifaceted: separatist organizations commonly find shelter in, sponsorship, or other forms of support from neighboring countries, thus contributing to bilateral and regional instability. Indeed, some separatist organizations, although with legitimate claims of their own, are understood as proxies or otherwise in the service of larger strategic arrangements (e.g., the use of Kurdish guerrillas in northern Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War, 1980–8). From the perspective of the host country, such organizations can be used as a buffer against an untrusted neighbor (e.g., Thailand’s former covert support of Burmese Karen separatists), as part of a policy of destabilization (e.g., China’s support for separatist organizations in north-east India), or in an effort to establish a more friendly regional government (e.g., India’s intervention in Bangladesh). Even in cases where a separatist organization does not concur with the strategic interests of another state, if successful, the creation of a new, separate state alters regional strategic balance by pursuing its own set of interests rather than those of the ‘parent’ state. The creation of Bangladesh, Eritrea, South Sudan, Kosovo and Timor-Leste each have established new regional dynamics that have required neighboring states to adjust their strategic policy settings, not always in ways which are regionally benign. State creation as an outcome of secessionist struggle, however, is not always straightforward since exercising effective control over territory is a necessary but not sufficient condition for international legitimacy. Often new entities lack international recognition and the creation of de facto states, usually supported by neighboring patron states, adds another layer of perplexity to the regional security nexus (Caspersen 2012; see Chapter 6 in this volume on the importance of recognition as a political tool). In addition, claims to secession are associated frequently with the development of organizations that have been characterized as ‘terrorist’ (Jackson 2007; Tuastad 2003; Zarakol 2011). In this case, non-state actors are usually viewed as illegitimate by the state in question and often by the international community, regardless of their methods or the basis for their claims (Chapter 7 in this volume illustrates this point). In some cases, such allegations against separatist organizations, based on trans-national associations, have some basis further highlighting the need for a framework to distinguish between terrorist and non-terrorist organizations.

As mentioned, separatist conflicts are characterized by extreme violence whilst their settlement usually comes at a high human, economic and political price, especially in cases where the logic of denial prevails by prioritizing military options (Walter 2009). Civilians are regularly displaced by such conflicts and often targeted by security forces for being sympathetic to separatist claims, while separatist organizations similarly target civilians who are not sympathetic or at least comply with their requirements, such as paying ‘taxes’ to fund their activities. What is certain, in such cases of military ‘solutions’, is the high number of casualties and the widespread gross violation of human rights that military engagement typically brings. Although military victory can have a significant impact on the dynamic of the conflict, it is uncertain whether it can end the conflict (Heraclides 1997). There are numerous examples of asymmetric warfare seeming to favor the larger military force but resulting in an effective stalemate, not least in separatist conflicts and especially where the separatist organization enjoys the popular support of the population it claims to represent. There are various estimates of the necessary ratio of military force required to win an asymmetric war, often cited at around 2:100 of the civilian population (Kozelka 2008) or 20:1 of the irregular military force. But the reality is that, no matter what the ratio between the forces is, a separatist organization able to draw on even a small group of committed militants with popular support can continue a struggle almost indefinitely.

Territorial separatism as a socio-political phenomenon stands at a crossroads of several lines of inquiry. As a field of study it is a contested terrain (Chapter 1 in this volume) which has become the focus of many disciplines requiring the division of labor among several branches of social sciences, political philosophy and law (international and constitutional law). However, the interdisciplinary character of territorial separatism is derived from the fact that the problem is fundamentally complex, calling for the integration of the contributions that the individual disciplines make (Repko 2012). Thus, understanding and analyzing separatist conflict and its potential for resolution must be an interdisciplinary exercise. The etiology for territorial separatism is subject to historical, ethnic, economic, political and structural factors (Toft 2012). Accordingly, separatism, as a complex social phenomenon, has to be analyzed from different perspectives in order for us to reach a holistic understanding of it. But this is not enough, since understanding is the first step towards an integrated approach that would seek to remedy separatist conflict and alleviate harm and suffering from both physical and non-physical violence. For all their successes and failures, separatist conflicts should not be seen only through the mono-dimensional ethnocentric lens which scholars, journalists, policy-makers and politicians have traditionally employed.

This book sets out to consider how and why separatism arises and, potentially, how its claims can be addressed. In doing so it covers a range of interdisciplinary perspectives and draws on a number of case studies that, between them, provide a reasonable sense of the breadth of the separatist spectrum. The volume brings together contributions on different themes within the broader literature on separatism, each with important implications for our understanding of the particular models that have been applied to the study of the various aspects of separatism and their limitations. The central argument and the key contributions of this book are twofold. First, it aims to situate the question of separatism within the broader socio-political context of the international system, arguing that a set
of historical events as well as local, regional and global dynamics have converged to provide the catalysts that often trigger separatist conflicts. Second, this book situates progress towards a new conceptual framework. The argument here is that territorial separatism poses a very specific challenge to conventional wisdom concerning conflict analysis and resolution within the context of international relations including issues such as the role of democracy, humanitarian intervention and post-conflict peacebuilding. The chapters in this book argue collectively that approaches to tame separatism can only endure and bring about positive outcomes if they are developed organically from the bottom up and in isolation from ideological agendas. This is a basis from which international legitimacy and endurance can be generated, leading to an outlook for state formation that can transcend some of the exclusionary characteristics of the Westphalian model.

The interdisciplinary character of the field is reflected in the first section of the book, with the opening chapter by Pavković addressing the diversity of approaches to secession that have yielded different and sometimes incompatible definitions of the phenomenon. This, then, sets the parameters for the studies that follow. Pavković notes that James Crawford (2006) restricts the concept of secession only to the withdrawal of territory which is opposed by a functioning host state. Mutually agreed withdrawal of territory or a withdrawal which is opposed by a disintegrating state do not, in his view, count as secession. Hechter (1975, 1992), by way of comparison, restricts secession only to the cases in which the host state remains as it was before the territory was withdrawn, whereas for John Wood (1981) every case of secession is a case of state disintegration. This chapter understanding separatism in the broader sense, including the actual or intended withdrawal of territory from an existing state which results, or is intended to result, in the creation of a new state.

Peter Radan follows this theme by addressing the key question as to whether there is a provision in international law for secession or whether it is simply a matter of whether such a claim is able to be asserted or denied. Radan suggests that international law is not clear as to whether there exists a limited right to unilateral secession or whether secession is purely a question of fact. Illustrating this point, Radan identifies the 1998 opinion in Reference re: Secession of Quebec, where the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that '[t]he process of recognition [of states], once considered to be an exercise of pure sovereign discretion, has come to be associated with legal norms' (Secession Reference 1998, p. 443). The issue explored by Radan in this chapter is the extent to which this statement pictures the situation with respect to statehood through secession. It has been argued that the right of peoples to self-determination grants a limited or 'remedial' right of secession. In 2010, the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion relating to Kosovo’s secession from Serbia had, but declined to grasp, an opportunity to clarify international law in relation to secession. Thus, Radan argues, the question of secession in international law appears to remain open.

Damien Kingsbury’s chapter on the failure of the state in relation to ethnic groupings returns to first principles, by proposing that the purpose of the state is to represent the interests of its citizens, which implies holding them in equal regard in relation to those benefits, opportunities or safeguards that the state is able to provide. To the extent that it has the capacity to do so, this implies that the state fulfills its basic civic function of existing on behalf of its citizens equally. His chapter further proposes that where states are challenged by separatist rebellions, this is primarily a consequence of the failure of the state to fulfill its basic functions to all its citizens equally, hence alienating geographically specific minority groups. While the potential pool of examples to draw on to help analyze the rationale for separatism is wide, Kingsbury’s chapter compares five case studies with which he has direct experience; Sri Lanka, Aceh, West Papua, Mindanao and Timor-Leste.

Costas Laoutides follows by examining how sustainable peace can be pursued in separatist conflicts and what the challenges are for peacebuilding operations within this context. He argues that secessionist conflicts are a particular type of internal conflict that raises issues of territorial control and survival of the communities in question. However, he suggests that separatist conflicts appear to be more amenable to negotiated settlements than other types of internal conflict. A qualification to this, he says, is that the implementation of peace accords through peacebuilding operations face two key challenges: the need for establishing a common political foundation for the distinct community that will foster trustful relations, and the transition of former fighters to agents of peace through a paradigmatic departure from identity politics that implement the ethnic security dilemma.

Richard Jackson continues the conflict resolution theme by problematizing the dominant peacebuilding template which international institutions currently apply to societies emerging from separatist war, thereby opening up analytical and normative space for the consideration of radically alternative peacebuilding approaches. His chapter starts by outlining a constructivist model of separatist war initiation, arguing that, among others, discursive factors, social structures, histories, narratives, discursive practices, play a central role that is relatively under-valued in most quantitative and structurally-based approaches to separatist war explanation, as well as in most institutional understandings of the causes of separatist war. Jackson then offers a brief but sustained critique of contemporary post-civil war peacebuilding approaches, particularly in terms of their neglect of the discursive factors highlighted in the constructivist model, but also in terms of their links to neoliberal imperialism and governmentality. In the final part of his chapter, Jackson proposes a radically alternative approach to ‘discursive peacebuilding’ after separatist war, which encompasses conflict transformation, agonistic democracy and dialogic politics, and the demilitarization of politics and its replacement with nonviolent and pacifist politics. As such, he proposes a peacebuilding approach which takes a post-Weberian or post-state polity as its normative goal.

The second part of the book focuses on the dynamics of various case studies. Not intending to be exhaustive, the case studies are chosen as a broad representative group of different types and stages of separatist claims and conflicts.
The war in Iraq, and its extended aftermath, have had a number of consequences, key among which is that as one of the arbitrarily constructed states that was a product of the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916, Iraq’s loose sense of unity has begun to unravel, as discussed by Ben Iskahan in Chapter 9. In his chapter, Iskahan examines the calls by the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) for an autonomous Shia Islamic state in the south of Iraq. While such calls have deep historical roots and have long formed part of SCIRI’s complex political and ideological history, they achieved a renewed momentum following the US attempt to bring a form of democracy to Iraq after the 2003 invasion. While the prospects for Shia secession in Iraq remain low, this chapter finds that it nonetheless forms an ongoing and central part of SCIRI’s political agenda and thus constitutes a key element in the make-up of the fractured Iraqi state.

Returning to South-east Asia, Anthony Ware explores the secessionist aspects of Muslim-Buddhist communal violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, that has accompanied that country’s move away from overt authoritarianism. From one perspective, the secessionist struggle in Rakhine was largely won by the Burmese military in the 1950s–60s, when the major, separate armed rebellions by both Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims was put down by the central government. Yet, despite being significantly weakened, four militant groups remain on the western Burmese border area, the Arakan Liberation Army and the Arakan Army, which is linked to the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA, one of only two of the United Nationalities Federal Council’s (UNFC) 12 armed ethnic groups to have not entered peace talks with the government), and, on the Rakhine side, the Rakhine Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO). Underscoring anti-Muslim violence has been the failure of a transition from secessionist conflict into a positive peace, set against the secessionist and nationalist aspirations of many of both the Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslims. When added to the five decades of structural violence by a military-led government, particularly against the Rohingya minority, what has been commonly reported as simply ‘Muslim–Buddhist communal violence’ is better understood as a complex of factors coalescing to inform and perpetuate that violence.

The volume concludes with a critical summation of the key arguments and points the way towards both academic and policy explorations in this evolving field of critical research. Not only does the conclusion serve as a postscript to claims for separate identity and the civil, intrastate separatist wars they can engender, it highlights some of the most recent critical thinking on the intertwined issues of separatism, the state, political identity and the possibilities for the resolution of such conflicts.

Notes
1 We would like to acknowledge the two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments.
2 Interestingly, this is in contradiction with possible interpretation of Charter 1.2 concerning the ‘self-determination of peoples’.
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