Secession within federations, a deficit in current theory of secession

Summary (English)
Commonly, secession has referred to a territory that was previously under the sovereignty of one state becoming (sovereign) territory of another state. However, secessions within federations, or internal secessions also occur. This is when a territory and its population secedes from the constituent unit they are part of but not from the wider federation. Yet no normative account of when internal secession is justified exists. In this article I show that existing liberal secession theories are external secession biased (and state centrist) and inadequate for considering internal secession. I argue that to be useful in providing guidance on when a claim for internal secession is justified they need to incorporate federalism principles in their normative discussions. This is to reflect the fact that internal secession does not occur in the context of international law but within a federation. In addition I argue that federalism scholars themselves have failed to focus on internal secession and hence this field of literature is also incapable of covering this deficit. I conclude with a suggestion for further research.

Personal Information:
Anthony Gilliland, research student, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona.