

Editorial—Developments in the field

State of the World and our Research Projects related to EthnoGeoPolitics:

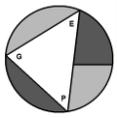
Observations on the Conundrum of Identities, Interests and Resolutions of Conflict by Diplomacy, Deterrence—or War

Caspar ten Dam

Current situation of our journal

As we have pointed out and analysed in preceding editorials and contributions of our journal, we face continuing outbreaks of (new variants of) the Covid-19 corona virus and other endemic health crises (Ten Dam & Rezvani 2020: 9; Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 174). We also continue to face low-intensity conflicts and full-scale wars, like the brief yet fiercely reignited conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh in July 2016 and September 2020 and the astounding takeover by the Taliban of Afghanistan in August 2021 (see Baghdasaryan 2019; Dorsey 2020; Rezvani & Ten Dam 2020b; James Dorsey in the current issue).

Indeed the severe impacts of the health crises, armed conflicts and tensions across the globe on some of our (advisory) board-members, editors and regular contributors residing in the most seriously affected countries, at least partially accounted for the “structural half-year backlog i.e. delay in the production of issues of our journal” (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 175 (quote); Ten Dam & Rezvani 2020a: 9).



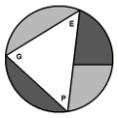
Fortunately, due to our joint efforts (and decision to produce slimmer issues in the immediate future), the appearance of the current issue as a single volume after the belated appearance of the Winter 2020 issue in August 2021 should partially overcome this backlog. We hereby thank our contributors and fellow-editors for their efforts—and hope that the state of the world and our personal lives will improve despite all the crises we have had to face and may still have to face.

Current state of the world: the examples of Ukraine, Bosnia and Taiwan

Sadly however, we need to add to our note of hope and optimism a note of caution—indeed a dire warning: all too often ethnogeopolitics manifests itself in instability, pandemics and violence, and many of our fellow researchers, scholars and academics still find themselves in the midst of it. Think of the current warnings, threats and counter-threats of sanctions, violence, supporting secession and even invasion by rivalling nations from East and West—either implicitly or explicitly, obliquely or bluntly—regarding the current and future status of countries like Ukraine, Bosnia and Taiwan. All these crises and potential wars in and against these countries exhibit ethnogeopolitical components.

Ukraine

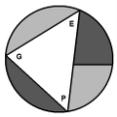
Russia's President Vladimir Putin reiterated at his latest annual year-end news conference his *de facto* ultimatum to the West that it—particularly the US and NATO—should quickly give written guarantees



that NATO would never expand any further to former Soviet republics such as Ukraine, no longer conduct any military activities there—and even draw down their presence in current NATO member states like Poland. Indeed Putin refused to explicitly, unequivocally rule out invading Ukraine in order defend ‘historically Russian territories’ like the Donbass there: “It was the United States that came with its missiles to our home, to the doorstep of our home. ... And you demand from me some guarantees? You should give us guarantees. You! And right away, right now.”¹

Irrespective of the merits of Putin’s security demands and grievances, the US, EU and NATO have shown little initiative and imagination beyond standard responses of ‘concern’ and ‘severe consequences’ including additional sanctions if Russia would indeed invade Ukraine, a country already weakened by the war in 2014 which led to the *de facto* secession of Donetsk and Luhansk in the east and the occupation of the Crimea by Russia in the south.

The decisionmakers in the West seem to be at a loss on how to deescalate the situation beyond assuaging or at least listening to the Russian demands and grievances—while at the same time sufficiently allaying Ukraine’s legitimate fears and concerns regarding Russia’s massive military buildup of over 100,000 troops at its borders. Incidentally, despite the military disparities, the Ukrainian armed forces would not be a pushover if Putin does decide to invade Ukraine.² This makes a lengthy and bloody war and subsequent guerrilla resistance all the more likely if such an invasion does transpire.

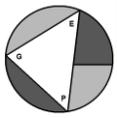


The US, NATO and also the EU are giving political, material, intelligence and even military support to the Ukrainian government and its armed forces, yet these very steps may provoke Putin into military action sooner rather than later. Calls not to 'sell out' Ukraine and 'appease' Russia, with or without an invasion by the latter of the former, are understandable and have some considerable merit if only to protect the principle of territorial integrity against aggression in international law and relations.³ Yet these calls by themselves do help little to deescalate the situation, let alone resolve it in a durable manner. The art of de-escalatory-yet-firm policymaking seems in short supply on all sides, with probably dire consequences for us all.

Bosnia

The current response of the international community in general, the West more specifically and the EU and NATO in particular to the current fragile state of Bosnia-Herzegovina is equally hesitant. Bosnia has known a fragile peace since the 1992-95 war following the breakup of Yugoslavia, under a sort of international protectorate headed by a High Representative under the Dayton Peace Agreement.

This peace agreement, which ended the devastating war in late 1995, established that the country were to be made up of two entities within a federal state: a 'Muslim-Croat' and a 'Bosnian-Serb' entity, the former essentially representing the area that the Bosnian government was occupying at the time, and the latter essentially representing the territory then occupied by the separatist *Republika Srpska* at the time.

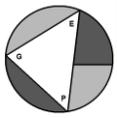


In recent months, however, the Bosnian-Serb leader Milorad Dodik has put the entire rickety Dayton system in jeopardy: he responded harshly to the decision by the previous High Representative Valentin Inkzo in July 2021 to introduce a rule stipulating that the July 1995 genocide in Srebrenica can no longer be denied on pain of a fine or prison sentence.

On Dodik's initiative (for either ideological or opportunist reasons to remain in power), the Bosnian-Serb parliament subsequently passed laws preparing to secede from the Bosnian state in violation of the Bosnian constitution, through disassociating from the central state institutions and even establishing its own army by May 2022, if its demand to rescind Inkzo's decision were not met. ⁴

The European Union in particular could and should play an important role in maintaining peace in Bosnia and throughout the former Yugoslavia, given its capacity, promises of development and membership (Slovenia and Croatia already are EU members states) and actual presence in the region. Thus to this day the office of High Representative in Bosnia, though not a direct EU position, is being held by a person (usually a former politician) from an EU country.⁵

Bosnian citizens therefore rightly expect concrete steps from the EU to maintain peace in Bosnia. Thus Bosnians from diverse backgrounds and denominations plan to demonstrate on 10 January 2022 in Brussels, Geneva, London, Sarajevo Ottawa, New York and multiple other cities across the world to show their support for a united Bosnia and demand from the international community in general and the EU in particular to keep it so. ⁶

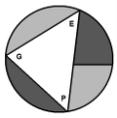


Fortunately, the EU can find heart in the latest polls by European Values Study in 2019-2020 in Bosnia, according to which a large majority of 74% of the population is against secession; indeed, even 66% of the population within *Srpska* opposes its own secession.⁷ The current High Representative Christoph Schmidt still has far-reaching powers he could employ; he already has implied to do so: “The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina want a peaceful and prosperous future. I am ready to contribute to this objective in a determined and responsible way.”⁸

Moreover, there still is a European peacekeeping force EUFOR to maintain peace in the country. Unfortunately in recent years EUFOR has been reduced from 6,000 personnel in 2004 to just 600 currently—just a symbolic and all but deterrent number.

Both American and European leaders such as Josep Borrell, EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, have been uttering (after some prompting by the European Parliament) fine words about the crucial importance of peaceful coexistence and territorial integrity, and dire warnings to those who seek to destroy it through (violent) secession.⁹ But these words should be backed up with action—including restoring EUFOR to its original strength.

One could hardly expect NATO to take over this role as it already has done plenty with IFOR and SFOR during the early post-war years in Bosnia until 2004. At any rate NATO’s priority and attention currently lies further to the East—that is to say, Russia’s policies toward Ukraine and the Baltic states.

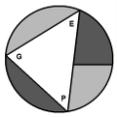


Taiwan

The West exhibits—at least publicly—a similar lack of initiative and imagination regarding Chinese President Xi Jinping's rather bellicose warnings to reunite the 'breakaway province' of Taiwan by force if necessary in the foreseeable and even near future. Outright invasion by China of one of Asia's most advanced democracies hangs in the air, is definitely possible. By and large the West appears to behave like a frightened rabbit caught in and paralysed by the headlights of this looming conflict, despite steps taken to check China's rising power in the region like the recently forged trilateral military alliance by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States called AUKUS (an acronym of their names) announced last September.¹⁰

In contrast, there appears to be no lack of confidence and consequent bullishness on China's part. Indeed, Elizabeth Economy reflects many an analyst's assessment of the vital importance of Taiwan to the Chinese regime's ideology, self-interest, legitimacy and ambition. She asserts that in "Xi's vision, a unified and resurgent China would be on par with or would surpass the United States" in power and prestige almost instantly once Taiwan is 'gobbled up' by mainland China through occupation or 'voluntary' reunification.¹¹ However one could or should argue with justification that any reunification of Taiwan with mainland China should occur voluntarily, peacefully and preferably under a democratic political system.

Arguably, China hard-power and soft-power politics and its heralded model of authoritarian state-capitalism are already more successful in

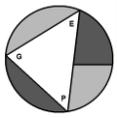


many respects than the United States' increasingly frayed model of democratic market-capitalism in many parts of the world, even far beyond the South China Sea. However, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seeking to link "the Eurasian landmass to the People's Republic" through extensive infrastructure projects faces grave challenges; thus its support for "autocratic rule in the greater Middle East meant that overseas Chinese nationals and assets became potential targets" by those violently opposing such rule (Dorsey 2018: 23 (quotes)).

Actually, "Chinese overseas outposts and assets have become targets, particularly in Pakistan but also in Central Asia" (Dorsey 2018: 25). Indeed, China's strong-arm tactics in effectively taken over parts of countries like Sri Lanka¹², Montenegro and Greece by controlling entire ports and infrastructures through spending and lending practices that lade these countries with unaffordable debts and other dependencies, have triggered backlashes including popular protests in these countries against China's overbearing presence.

James Dorsey rightly warns that "China, like the United States did for decades, ignores the rumblings just below the surface [in many countries under authoritarian rule] even if the global trend is toward more authoritarian, more autocratic rule" (Dorsey 2018: 25).

Consequently Xi's apparent belief that China's dominance could be secured by sheer manipulation, intimidation or outright incorporation of other countries could be his undoing, "preventing him from recognizing the resistance Beijing is stoking through its actions abroad," according to Elizabeth Economy; thus "Xi's success depends on whether he can adjust and reckon with the blowback. Failing to do so could lead



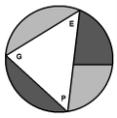
to further miscalculations that may end up reshaping the global order—just not in the way Xi imagines.”¹³

Be that as it may, China might be militarily successful in invading and occupying Taiwan (indeed most war games at the Pentagon of this scenario show this outcome), yet at tremendous political and economic costs—including driving spooked neighbouring and even faraway countries into the arms of America and its alliances more tightly than ever before. This outcome would paradoxically strengthen the West for years or even decades to come, delaying or even durably stumping China’s rise as a world power.

Irrespective of the fallout and the direction a new world order would take, a war over Taiwan—even if one-sided without the US and its allies militarily taking sides with Taiwan—would come at the tremendous cost of innumerable lives lost and unimaginable consequences to the world economy. For that reason alone, credibly deterring China from invading or otherwise forcibly taking over Taiwan is of vital importance to us all.

Essentially, the crucial question remains whether and how the West can muster credible deterrence to authoritarian adventurers like Dodik, Putin and Xi—especially when it does not seem to have the stomach to wage war even for its own security, let alone limited military operations to protect the security of others.

Without true readiness to wage war, would deterrence ever be credible? That is the age-old question and dilemma, especially for peaceful societies that have grown unaccustomed to full-scale war, which seems



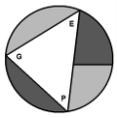
practically insoluble apart from installing a mutually-assured-destruction logic with nuclear arms like during the height of the Cold War.

Basically this dilemma can only be resolved by either waging war against authoritarian aggression if push comes to shove, or giving in through dithering, symbolic and ineffective sanctions and outright appeasement and acceptance of a 'new situation on the ground'—or by a miracle of successful diplomacy that would somehow reconcile or compensate interests, demands and grievances on all sides that once seemed irreconcilable before.

Therefore the unimaginableness of full-scale, regional war, and being involved in it or directly part of it, among the new generations in most Western societies ever since WWII—major interventions and consequent wars in places like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq notwithstanding—plays a major part in the apparent unimaginativeness and paralysis of Western policymaking on matters of war and peace.

By and large ordinary citizens and even the most hawkish political leaders in most Western societies seem unready and unwilling to put their lives on the line to protect 'faraway' places like Taiwan, Ukraine and Bosnia. Beyond the question whether we need or should be involved in any such wars if these transpire (arguably we should not), the very unreadiness and unwillingness to truly consider, or just imagine, such eventualities is troubling.

Have we in the West grown 'weak', grown 'soft'? Certainly authoritarian leaders like Putin and Xi Jinping seem to think so, rightly or wrongly so,



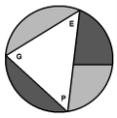
which may tempt them to take drastic military and other aggressive steps with dire consequences for ‘them’ in the East and ‘us’ in the West—for us all actually. We live in ‘interesting times’ indeed.

Current state of our research projects

Presently our research projects on ‘Kinship Groups in Present-day Societies’, ‘Ethnic and Kinship Bonds as Challenges of EU Enlargement in South-East Europe’ and ‘European Cultures and Cultures in European Countries’ (see Ten Dam 2019; Ten Dam & Shi 2020; see further Ten Dam 2020a; Shi 2021a) are proceeding apace. Thus we have received a few submitted manuscripts for collaboration and/or joint publication in each project concerned.

However, many more submissions are required in order to bring these projects to full fruition. Thus Ms. Zhang Shi, our new assistant editor specialised in Chinese studies and Asian and world cultures (who may disagree with my observations on China and Taiwan here), is looking for more book-chapter submissions for her *European Cultures and Cultures in European Countries* book project—as well as for her planned book projects on *Asian Cultures and Cultures in Asia* and *World Cultures and Cultures in the World* (see Shi 2021a&b; Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 180-185).

Zhang Shi: “At present, our World Culture team has finished writing on the cultures in or of Slovenia, Maldives and Spain; we need volunteers who can help us review .. [the submissions] and preferably include themselves as native co-authors. We will finish contributions on Thailand and Saudi Arabia cultures by the end of 2021, so we welcome

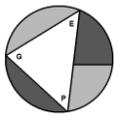


native co-authors to join us in these endeavours. Our Asia culture team has recently finished one chapter on Nepali culture for Asia” (Shi 2021b). The book projects on Asian and World cultures follow the same structure as the one on European cultures: “For each book chapter the culture of each country and region .. can be divided into six parts: introduction of the whole country and region, geographical location, history, population, climate, political economy, food, clothing, famous scenic spots or buildings, religious festivals, and politics. Each part requires at least one picture and corresponding explanatory text” (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 184).

A closer look at our research on Kinship Bonds in current and prospective EU member states

The particular project ‘Ethnic and Kinship Bonds as Challenges of EU Enlargement in South-East Europe’ does look at the kinship identities within both current EU member states and prospective candidate states in beyond South-East Europe or the Western Balkans (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 178). These identities are part of broader ethnogeopolitical factors i.e. “cultural, social, religious, ethnic and (geo-)political characteristics, processes and developments” (Ten Dam 2019: 159).¹⁴

Still, the focus during the first phase of the project will remain on such identities within countries in the Western Balkans, “that is to say Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia” (Ten Dam 2019: 159 (quote), 164, endnote 2).¹⁵

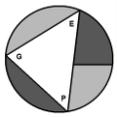


Additional literature reviews are particularly needed to further buttress—or rather falsify i.e. stress-test and if necessary discount—my rather strong statement that “analysisists and policymakers within both the EU institutions and established EU member states have tended to neglect ethnogeopolitical factors such as ethno-patrimonialism and tribal, clannish and other sub-ethnic and sub-national identities and alliances” (Ten Dam 2019: 162)—and arguably geographical and state-forming characteristics (see esp. Rezvani & Ten Dam 2020a).

My initial literature review on “ethnogeopolitical factors ... characterising and affecting past, present and future societies in general ... and EU accession candidates in particular” (Ten Dam 2019: 161-162) has corroborated this statement, yet requires more corroboration still in order to make it a plausibly, convincingly valid one.

This initial review already has found that most research attention and knowledge about these countries and societies appear to concern their “socio-economic, judicial and political-system characteristics—including the legacies of (post-)communism and the halting development of democracy and civil society vis-à-vis corruption and patrimonialism, and the interrelated challenges and proposed policies for the EU itself and its enlargement” (Ten Dam 2019: 162 (quote); see e.g. Albi 2005; Blockmans 2007; Bache 2010; Rupnik 2011; Schwarz 2016; Elbasani & Šabić 2018).

In the same initial review I claim that even “analysisists acknowledging ‘problematic’ national, ethnic and regional or local identities and norms within both current and prospective EU member states, generally fail to detect sub-ethnic and sub-national kinship identities and norms



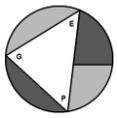
affecting or even underpinning the overarching identities and norms in any of these states” (Ten Dam 2019: 162 (quote); see e.g. Noutcheva 2009; Freyburg & Richter 2010; Ker-Lindsay et al 2017) .

If true, and if ethnogeopolitical factors like ethnic and kinship bonds are “ignored or misunderstood, any further EU enlargement” with western Balkan and any other states will be “even more challenging and troublesome or even more unlikely” (Ten Dam 2019: 161)—and adversely affect the workings and enlargement of the EU in general. Consequently I have emphasised that this “dire prospect (for so far one supports EU enlargement) ought to underpin the practical policymaking relevance of looking at kinship identities in both actual and prospective EU member states” (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 179).

The extended literature review to be mentioned later on confirms to a considerable extent the “apparent lack of knowledge and understanding within EU institutions and current member states of kinship bonds” in their midst and in prospective candidate states within and beyond South-East Europe (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 179).

A further literature review planned in the immediate future may show that other international and regional bodies like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and any of their member states are somewhat more knowledgeable about kinships and other ethnogeopolitical factors—yet not to the extent that they genuinely prioritise these factors in their thinking and policymaking.

Nevertheless, any additional knowledge from these governmental

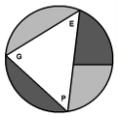


organisations (GOs) or supranational organisations (SOs) and their constituent members should offer “insights useful and perhaps crucial to the EU, if only because its actual and prospective memberships overlap with NATO, OSCE and other GOs” (Ten Dam & Shi 2020: 180).

The extended review more generally upholds the proposition of neglected attention and analysis by both researchers and policymakers of kinship identities and norms within current and prospective EU member states—though with a few nuances and (partial) exceptions (e.g. Blockmans 2007; Ejodus & Jureković 2016; Esch, Kabus & Mallory 2012). The same review suggests that such attention and analysis seems to be more significant regarding the current and prospective member states of other GOs—but still insufficiently so (e.g. Sabahi & Warner 2004).

At any rate this extended review reveals and confirms that hardly any research is being done on kinship bonds in relation to EU functioning or enlargement. Most academic, mostly policy-oriented or security-focused analyses of EU involvement in the Western Balkans or beyond simply do not take into account kinship bonds, as shown by the practically absent use of terms like ‘clans’, ‘tribes’ or ‘kinship groups’—and rare use of terms like ‘families’, ‘extended families’ or ‘patriarchal families’—in their publications (see e.g. Arbeiter & Udovič 2016; Ejodus 2017; Ejodus & Juncos 2018; Van Meurs 2001).

Likewise kinship bonds appear to rarely appear in analyses of ethnogeopolitical, sociological and/or security-oriented analyses of the societies concerned in the Western Balkans beyond the topic or framework of EU enlargement and policymaking—or even those in



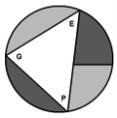
other regions like the Caucasus (e.g. Göksel & Shiriyev 2013; Krasniqi 2011; Shtuni 2015). The outcomes of this review will be described in more detail in future publications.

Concluding remarks

A serious issue still facing our research projects having to do with ethnogeopolitics is the given that to date we have not explicitly dealt with the possibility that the societies studied might be mired in violent conflict—and with the question of how this might involve or affect the role and functioning of kinship groups in any such conflict. Indeed, as of now the current descriptions of these projects seem to implicitly assume that all the countries and societies concerned are enjoying peace rather than being endangered by potential war or suffering from actual war.

This oversight on our part needs to be rectified. From here on, we will pay close attention to any causal, transformative and contributing roles of kinship groups vis-à-vis broader ethnogeopolitical factors within these countries if these countries get mired in violent conflict. Additionally, we will assess the likely diminishing prospects of EU membership for prospective candidate states if these do get mired in conflict.

Fortunately, I have extensively studied and described violent conflict by and among particularly the Chechens and Albanians in earlier publications (e.g. Ten Dam 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2020b, 2021)—as I do in my review essay on ‘Codes and Violence during the Chechen Wars’ in the current issue of our journal. Therefore we just

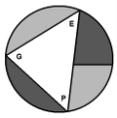


need to explicitly integrate and utilise our own insights on the causes, dynamics and consequences of armed conflict in the mentioned research projects—as we can and will do so in future updates and publications on these projects in this journal and elsewhere.

All too often the study of ethnogeopolitics, as a field of studies and a discipline, involves the study of ethnogeopolitical conflict—thus involving the insights and methodologies of the fields of conflict analysis and conflict resolution as well. Therefore the possible outbreak of violent conflict in countries like Ukraine, Bosnia and Taiwan would have far-reaching consequences for our current and any future research projects having directly or indirectly to do with ethnogeopolitics—beyond the (im)possibility of doing field research in such countries in the midst of conflict.

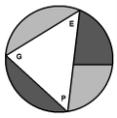
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Postscript One of worst fears expressed in this Editorial (in which I express my own opinions rather than those of the entire editorial board) has come to pass: on February 24th Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then the Western response (full condemnation, stiff sanctions, military aid, etc.) shows far more resolve, initiative and imagination than I have expected. The fierce Ukrainian resistance stymieing the Russian advance, however, is according to my expectations.

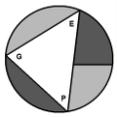


Endnotes

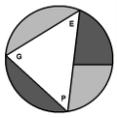
1. Natasha Frost, 'Putin demands quick answers on Russian security' *New York Times Morning Briefing*, 24 December 2021.
See also Anton Troianovski, Andrew E. Kramer & David E. Sanger, 'Putin Mixes Positive Note With Threats, Keeping West on Edge' *New York Times*, 23 December 2021;
www.nytimes.com/2021/12/23/world/europe/russia-putin-ukraine.html.
See further Helene Cooper & Julian E. Barnes, 'U.S. Considers Warning Ukraine of a Russian Invasion in Real-Time' *New York Times*, 23 December 2021; www.nytimes.com/2021/12/23/us/politics/russia-ukraine-military-biden.html?te=1&nl=morning-briefing%3A-europe-edition&emc=edit_mbe_20211224.
2. See www.rferl.org/a/russia-vs-ukraine-military/31664931.html.
3. See e.g. Dmytro Kuleba, 'Don't Sell Out Ukraine - The West Must Respond to Russia With Strength, Not Appeasement' *Foreign Affairs* 10 December 2021; www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2021-12-10/dont-sell-out-ukraine.
4. See e.g. Srecko Latal, 'Radical Rhetoric in Bosnia Revives Fears of New Conflict' *BalkanInsight* / Balkan Investigative Regional Reporting Network (BIRN), 5 October 2021;
<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/05/radical-rhetoric-in-bosnia-revives-fears-of-new-conflict>.
Srecko Latal, 'What Does Bosnian Serb Strongman Milorad Dodik Really Want?' *BalkanInsight* / BIRN, 8 November 2021;
<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/08/what-does-bosnian-serb-strongman-milorad-dodik-really-want>.
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15. My Editorial in the Winter 2019 issue of our journal erroneously refers to “proposed project A” in endnote 2 (Ten Dam 2019: 164); this endnote actually refers to the “more particular project B” (Ibid: 156).

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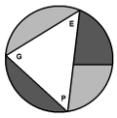
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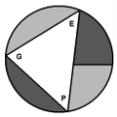
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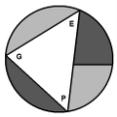
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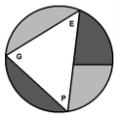
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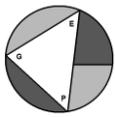
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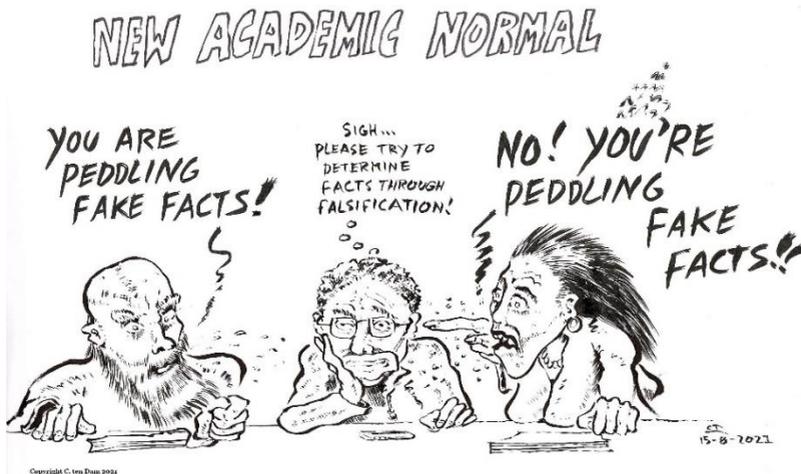


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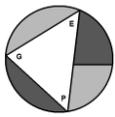
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