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Stephanie M. Lezotte
Rowan University

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Violence Against the Academy: A Comparative Analysis of Attacks and Implications for the Future of Higher Education

Stephanie Lezotte

Abstract

Attacks on education, both physical and symbolic in nature, have various motives and consequences, and thus attempts at comparison can be challenging. This article is a descriptive comparative analysis of political attacks on higher education, defined for this purpose as attacks supported, ignored, or perpetuated by political powers. The units of analysis are Zimbabwe and Iraq, selected for their historical contexts that include long-term oppressive regimes and violence against higher education. This article employs document collection as a methodological approach and Galtung's (1990) Violence Triangle as a lens for document analysis. Contextual equivalency between Zimbabwe and Iraq is established; political attacks on higher education are compared and contrasted; and implications for policymakers, educators, the international community, and researchers are provided.

Keywords: comparative education, higher education violence, Violence Triangle

While research has shown that higher education is essential to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, universities can also be the recipients of targeted violence (Bohannon, 2012; Johnson & Hoba, 2015; Milton & Barakat, 2016; UNESCO, 2016). Attacks on higher education are perpetrated by various actors and take various forms. In addition to individual intentions, motives can also be entrenched in politics. Governing regimes, political rivals, and military forces may attack higher education to gain political positioning, quell rebellion or resistance, mete out punishment, encourage cultural intolerance, or enact revenge. Not all attacks involve physical violence. Censure, institutionalized discrimination, and intentional underinvestment are examples of symbolic violence used to control and manipulate universities and their constituents. This paper refers to attacks on higher education that are supported, ignored, or perpetuated by political powers as *political attacks*. Political attacks are a threat to the very institution of higher education and the issue requires global acknowledgement and response. Given the importance of examining historical contexts, political attacks on higher education can be studied from a comparative perspective.

One purpose of comparative education studies is to

learn from and understand the experiences of others and ourselves (Hall, 1973). In order to raise awareness and urge individuals to actively reject violence against the academy, this article provides a descriptive account of two regimes that have participated in political attacks on higher education. The research was driven by the following question: how do political attacks on higher education manifest among different historical contexts? Using Galtung's (1990) Violence Triangle as a theoretical framework, the paper compares political attacks between Zimbabwe and Iraq and provides generalized and contextualized implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers.

Theoretical Framework

Galtung (1969, 1990) described violence as a condition or phenomenon that inhibits an individual from realizing one's full potential. Galtung suggested violence can be direct, structural, and/or cultural. Direct violence is committed by an actor to directly harm others, such as a physical attack or bombing. As will be discussed later, direct violence in higher education can be used to assert political power or resist political control and is apparent in the kidnapping of academics and destruction of campuses. Structural violence involves the distribution or redistribution of power and is more stable and long-term than direct

violence. Society cannot always recognize structural violence, as it will only “show” when accompanied by direct violence (Galtung, 1990, p. 173). Although this article primarily focuses on threats to academic freedom, structural violence also manifests as barriers to postsecondary access, intentional underinvestment in higher education, or deliberate weakening of shared governance. Galtung (1990) later wrote about cultural violence, describing it as aspects of culture (e.g. ideology, religion, language, art, and science) that can be used to advance or legitimize direct or structural violence. Cultural violence may manifest as anthems, propaganda, inflammatory speeches, flags, and portraits of political leaders (Galtung, 1990). Cultural violence is designed to make direct or structural violence “look, even feel, right” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). These three forms of violence – direct, structural, and culture – create what Galtung (1990) called the Violence Triangle. Although the Violence Triangle has been frequently cited in peace education literature, it has also been used to understand political attacks on education (Emerson, 2018; Tuntivivat, 2016). An internet search performed by the author returned no literature using the Violence Triangle in comparative educational research, providing an

opportunity to examine direct, structural, and cultural violence among multiple contexts.

Literature Review

Because political attacks on higher education are initiated for a variety of reasons and are contextualized differently, it is appropriate to bind the literature review around the three forms of violence identified in the Violence Triangle. For this reason, other types of attacks on education are excluded from this review. As detailed next, political attacks against higher education take various forms dependent upon contexts.

Direct Violence: Asserts Political Power, Resistance or Revenge

In many nations, political attacks on higher education can be a popular way to subdue dissidents and prevent coups (Altbach, 2001; Hajjar & Daragahi, 2011). Indeed, fear of losing political power due to academic activism and influence is a legitimate concern. Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer (2007) presented a model indicating a country’s education level was a strong predictor of its transition to democracy. They noted that democracies distribute smaller benefits to more people (compared to larger incentives that dictatorships provide to the few) and suggested that educated citizens increasingly “fight

for the more inclusive” governments because more benefits are distributed (Glaser et al., 2007, p. 5). Thus, it is not surprising that faculty and student activists have been at the forefront of several regime overthrows. In Indonesia, academics took part in a democratization movement that toppled the ruling party, while faculty and students in Iran provided the necessary leadership to oppose the Shah and demand governmental liberalization (Altbach, 2001). Political regimes may then resort to direct violence to control university members whom they perceive as a threat.

In some cases, student activists perpetrate violence in response to their government’s action or lack of action. Fokwang (2009) found that students at the University of Buea in Cameroon blamed local officials for failing to protect their living quarters, which were common targets of armed robbers. Since police rejected their proposed solutions, students burned to death a suspected bandit (Fokwang, 2009). Johnson and Hoba (2015) found that students in Côte d’Ivoire considered violence and rebellion a feasible alternative after being ignored by the minister of higher education during the peacebuilding and reconstruction process. In response, angry students burned the minister’s car during a campus visit (Johnson & Hoba,

2015). Consequently, faculty and student activists further become targets of political violence.

Direct violence can be perpetrated at university facilities in retaliation for government or military actions unrelated to education. In 2009, two Taliban suicide bombers killed five students at the International Islamic University in Islamabad in response to Pakistani military action elsewhere (O’Malley, 2014). Likewise, Israeli forces damaged 93% of postsecondary institutions in the Gaza Strip, completely destroying three of them, alleging weapons were stored there (Silverman, 2009). By crippling university facilities, governing regimes disrupt intellectual activities and knowledge capacity building, sending a clear message that campuses are not privileged sites.

Structural Violence Threatens Academic Freedom

Stifling academic freedom is another way regimes target faculty and student to prevent government coups, reduce the spread of democratic ideologies, and displace academics (Gusterson, 2012). This form of structural violence is less visible, but quite dangerous. For example, in Serbia, Belgrade University faculty were issued a revised employment contract after Milošević’s educational reform limited their academic freedom and autonomy (Vukasovic, 2014). Interpreting the contract as a

statement of obedience to the regime, 200 faculty refused to sign and were subsequently fired or relocated to other institutions (Vukasovic, 2014). Similarly, academics in Singapore and Malaysia were unable to research or teach about ethnic conflict, religious issues, or local corruption (Altbach, 2001), and professors in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina were forced to give higher grades to students with certain political connections (U.S. Department of State, 2015). Threats to academic freedom can be as powerful as direct violence in achieving desired objectives by creating structural barriers and reducing faculty autonomy.

Structural violence also manifests as financial oppression, university closures, and restricted curricula and operations. Aghedo (2015) examined structural violence in Nigeria and reasoned that its higher education system criminalized students through inadequate infrastructure and funding, inattention to corruption, and the debasement of social and academic norms, values, and ethics. Johnson (2019) and Sawyerr (1996) found that even among African nations, which explicitly defined and promoted academic freedom, political regimes were still able to repress faculty and students due to university reliance on funding. Compounding the problem,

governments in high-conflict nations allocate less funding to higher education and more money to military operations, interrupting educational initiatives (UNESCO, 2011). Even in the United States, where academic freedom has been relatively enjoyed, new troubles have emerged. After the 2001 terrorist attacks, the federal government tightened student visa policies, monitored faculty and student e-mails, and increased campus surveillance (UNESCO, 2010). Further, cases challenging academic freedom relating to digital communication and social media, sexual harassment (e.g. using pornography as a pedagogical tool), and national security are making their way to U.S. courts with increasing frequency (O'Neil, 2011).

Cultural Violence: Legitimized Indoctrinated Beliefs

Cultural violence serves to legitimize other forms of violence and includes child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, youth violence, and community violence (World Health Organization, 2009). Cultural violence is also perpetuated by extremism, which is defined as the “beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically-motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political views” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 11). This was the case in Kenya when politicians of rival ethnicities allegedly incited violence after a tense election,

forcing a university to close for two months without regard to those trapped on or off campus (Johnson & Singleton, 2015). Upon reopening, Johnson and Singleton (2015) found faculty and staff were disoriented from the university due to a “spirit of suspicion” in which peer harassment, threats, and acts of violence were based on perceived political, and thus ethnic, affiliation (p. 243).

Higher education imparts not only knowledge and skills but also values and attitudes (Lagemann, 2012). Especially during times of conflict, cultural transmissions may “create invisible boundaries that can lead to dehumanization” of one’s enemies (Standish, 2015, p. 4). This dehumanization was demonstrated in Nazi Germany, wherein a purpose of schooling was to “indoctrinate [students] with a fanatical faith in the incomparable superiority of the German ‘race’” (Wolf, 2012, p. 4). Citizens who witness their rulers supporting cultural violence may interpret that as permission to engage in violence themselves. Changing cultural norms is a solution, but not an easy or undebated one. Farmer (1996) acknowledged that while cultural violence may appear blatant, a society might value violent traditions or laws such as female circumcision. He implied that researchers face the dilemma of

either respecting or discrediting cultural practices based on an outsiders’ perspective of norms, bringing one’s positionality to the forefront. Ultimately, Farmer (1996) concluded that researchers should not accept cultural relativism as justification for violence that perpetuate inequities. A Gramscian interpretation of cultural relativism underscores a society that prefers being regulated over rebelling (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci (1971) suggested that it is easier for “petty” intellectuals to accept governing rule than to revolt, allowing hegemonic ideologies to reproduce (p. 258). Yet students and faculty do revolt against oppressive governing bodies, though not always in solidarity. For example, a university in Côte d’Ivoire was physically divided by armed students who supported rival political parties, forcing a year-long closure (Johnson, 2019). In this case, the violence initiated by students was the result of cultural violence perpetuated by the president’s unwillingness to cede power to an elected official (Johnson, 2019).

Methodology

This study adapted Phillips' (2006) structure for comparative inquiry. This structure involves presenting the issue, contextualizing the issue locally, isolating differences to form a hypothesis, reconceptualizing findings in light of

the hypothesis, and generalizing findings (Phillips, 2006). Thus far in this paper, the issue of political attacks on higher education was conceptualized and supported by a theoretical framework and literature review. This section describes how data were collected and analyzed in order to establish comparative equivalency, form a hypothesis, and organize findings.

To identify the two units of analysis, the author examined a 2014 report issued by *The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack*. Both Iraq and Zimbabwe were on its list of thirty countries wherein the highest number of attacks on education were recorded (a newer report was issued in 2018, after the time of writing) (O'Malley, 2014). Iraq and Zimbabwe also had two of the longest lasting modern regimes (24 and 37 years, respectively). Two countries with longer regimes were excluded from comparison due to a governing structure that included multiple officials: Iran (30 years of a Supreme Leader alongside an elected President) and Myanmar (49 years of military-led rule with multiple leaders).

Document collection and analysis is an appropriate qualitative approach to understand the historical roots of an issue (Bowen, 2009). Document collection occurred over a period of three months and consisted of searching

for newspaper articles, investigative reports, websites, statistics, empirical literature, and books. Google search engine was used to identify documents relevant to political attacks on higher education in Zimbabwe and Iraq published in the previous ten years (2008-2018). Documents collected to understand historical context did not have date parameters. Newspapers were found to be most likely to report individual incidents of violence and tie these to patterns of more pervasive violence. Investigative reports were found to be more likely to describe patterns of political attacks on education, explain the consequences, and offer solutions. Finally, books and empirical literature provided a deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of violence, violence types, and contexts surrounding violence. Being sensitive to the purpose of the document and the document's target audience was useful in assessing and evaluating the documents (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the researcher avoided collecting documents issued by Zimbabwe's and Iraq's governments due to questionable intent, bias, and potential for propaganda.

The researcher employed Bowen's (2009) document analysis method, which involves an iterative process of skimming, reading, and interpreting. By skimming to identify "meaningful and relevant passages of text or other data," the researcher determined that 29 of 37 documents

collected contained information that described the contextual nuances of Zimbabwe and Iraq and were further analyzed (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). A more thorough reading of those documents provided a better understanding of contexts and often led to supplementary or corroborating documents that were not systematically analyzed. In the interpretation stage, concept coding was conducted to interpret the broader meaning behind the data (Saldaña, 2016). The author acknowledges data are contextually laden and meanings do not naturally exist outside of historical context (Hodder, 2012). Instead, meanings are interpreted based on one's positionality and contextual knowledge. In total, over 1,000 pages of documents were examined and analyzed, with the majority of data derived from journal articles ($n=9$), investigative reports ($n=8$), and newspaper articles ($n=7$).

Bowen's (2009) process for document analysis also calls for engaging in thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes)" across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Using the Violence Triangle as a theoretical framework allowed the researcher to conduct a deductive thematic analysis driven by and limited to notions of direct, structural, and cultural violence as themes. This deductive approach to

thematic analysis provides specific details of certain data, but less rich data descriptions overall (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During thematic analysis, it became evident that some political attacks could fit into more than one Violence Triangle categories, as Galtung himself suggested. For this reason, the researcher decided not to further break down the Violence Triangle category into the individual categories of direct, structural, and cultural violence.

In reporting the findings, the author aimed to present each country's history and context in ways that would inflict the least symbolic violence. This process consisted of triple fact-checking to ensure documents were not misreported and data could be corroborated among multiple sources. Throughout the document analysis process, the author was mindful to reject ethnocentric perspectives and sought to "represent the research material fairly" through the accounts of international authors and scholars (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). In addition, the author carefully considered use of language to avoid bias, and versions of the paper were peer-checked by an educational comparativist scholar to increase trustworthiness.

Comparative Equivalency and Contextualization

It is important for educational comparativists to establish appropriate

and adequate equivalency when comparing two systems, which establishes a “constant” between societies (Phillips, 2006, p. 315). Establishing a comparative equivalency provides a point of reference in which “phenomena can be observed and compared” (Wielemans & Chan, 1992, p. 414). Nowak described five types of equivalencies that can be used in comparative analysis: cultural, contextual, functional, and correlative, and genetic (1977). This study employed a contextual comparative equivalency. Wielemans and Choi-Ping Chan (1992) elaborated on contextual equivalence, which assumes phenomenon or objects are both part of the same global system, but smaller differences emerge based on local context. Although higher education systems exist in both countries in this analysis, each system is fraught with different challenges. Contextualization of each country follows.

Zimbabwe Historical Context

Zimbabwe gained political independence from Britain in 1980. Robert Mugabe was named prime minister, a position carrying more political weight than president (BBC, 2018b). Mugabe eliminated the position of prime minister in 1987 and appointed himself president, a position he retained

until he reluctantly resigned in 2017 (BBC, 2018b). His long reign was fraught with conspiracy theories, military and political violence within and beyond Zimbabwe’s borders, allegations of corruption, and citizen protests; violence was particularly high during election periods, the outcomes of which were often contested (Schreiner Evans, Lindemann, & Nordvik, 2012). Post-election chaos in 2008 resulted in more than 270 deaths, thousands of injuries, and tens of thousands of displacements (U.S. Department of State, 2012). In the 2000s, Zimbabwe faced severe food shortages amid economic crisis, and sanctions for human rights violations imposed by the European Union and the United States resulted in aid stoppage from The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (BBC, 2018b). Many of the human rights offenses had cultural origins. For example, Mugabe regularly dismissed calls for civil and political rights in favor of radical nationalism (Hwami, 2010). For much of his political career, Mugabe belonged to the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), rival party to the Movement for Democratic Change that formed in 1999. The two parties have a tumultuous and bloody history, and Mugabe’s regime was particularly noted for its torture, abuse, arrest, and harassment of non-ZANU-PF citizens (BBC, 2018b; U.S. Department of State, 2012). Now in his nineties, Mugabe intended to run for re-

election in 2018 but his own party ousted him in 2017, appointing his vice-president as leader (BBC, 2018b).

Iraq Historical Context

Iraq gained independence from Britain in 1958. Saddam Hussein became president in 1979 and soon after invaded Iran in an attempt to extend Iraq's hegemonic, political, and cultural influence (BBC, 2018a). After Iraq later occupied Kuwait, the United Nations ordered retaliation, and the following years were marked by air strikes, expanded no-fly zones, and allegations of weapons stockpiles, resulting in a second U.S.-led invasion that toppled Hussein's regime in 2003 (Crichton, Lamb, & Jacquette, 2013). Iraq's ruling class has been dominated by Shi'ite religious groups since the 2006 execution of Hussein, leaving the country in organizational disarray as rival Sunnis compete for political control (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2013). In 2006, the United Nations reported that an average of 100 Iraqi civilians were being killed each day (Semple, 2006). Although U.S. forces withdrew from the country in 2011, violence continues as government forces combat Islamic State fighters capturing cities and destroying historical and cultural sites (BBC, 2018a).

Isolation of Differences

Zimbabwe and Iraq both secured their independence in the late twentieth century, resulting in an aftermath of political uncertainty and power struggles. Until the overthrow of each leader, each country was ruled by a single individual for decades, although governance was certainly not unchallenged. Leaders engaged in direct, structural, and cultural violence, affecting their relationships with international agencies and angering political rivals and allies alike. Foreign governments and supranational organizations were push-pull forces in capacity building efforts, providing or withholding aid based on the regimes' actions. Both regimes can be characterized by internal strife, disregard for human and civil rights, and mistreatment of citizens.

However, there are critical differences among the historical contexts of these two countries. Mugabe's ideological views of radical nationalism positioned national interests before human rights, and his tyrannical reign and reluctance to cede power resulted in political and cultural oppression. His violent political rivalry set poor precedence for citizens, who received unjustified punishments. Iraq also endured deadly dictatorship and negligence of human rights, but regional and national wars further retarded nation-building. Pre-conflict, Iraq's higher education system produced large numbers of scholars,

scientists, teachers, and workers. But Iraqi higher education has yet to be rebuilt to its former status. In analyzing these contextual differences, the researcher hypothesized that political attacks on education would predominantly reflect what has occurred in each country at a macro level, particularly radical nationalism and political oppression in Zimbabwe and sustained large-scale violence and disorder in Iraq. Keeping these differences in mind, the remainder of the paper will describe how political attacks on higher education differed among countries and conclude with contextualized and generalized implications.

Contextualization of Findings

This section presents contextualization of findings from document analysis. Findings are illuminated by the historical backdrop of each country. Similarities are explicated, as are differences that could not be attributed to comparative equivalency.

Zimbabwe

Mugabe and his political supporters viewed globalization as a product of neo-colonialism and blamed Western neoliberal practices for the erosion of higher education in Zimbabwe (Shizha & Kariwo,

2011). Accordingly, higher education in Zimbabwe has long been politicized; in 1980, Mugabe proclaimed, “higher education is too important a business to be left entirely to deans, professors, lecturers and university administrators” (Hwami, 2010, p. 72). By law, the President of Zimbabwe is the Chancellor of the six state-sponsored universities and therefore has extensive power (Nyazema, 2010). One of the greatest motives for Mugabe’s use of direct violence against higher education appeared to be fear of government overthrow. Even innocent academic gatherings became targets for political violence. In 2011, a group of students/activists at the University of Zimbabwe arranged a showing of Arab Spring videos (Baldauf, 2011; Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2013). Police arrested and tortured the group, and 45 people faced charges of treason and government subversion - charges that carried the death penalty if found guilty. Six individuals ultimately were each charged a fine equivalent to more than a year’s salary while the rest were released (Mavhunga, 2012).

Zimbabwe’s long history of student activism was not well tolerated by Mugabe’s regime once student groups rejected the government in the late 1980s (Zeilig, 2008). Chikwanha (2009) noted that every leader of a student group in Zimbabwe had been arrested since 1989, and accounts

from Schreiner Evans et al. (2012) showed student leaders were permanently banned from participating in Zimbabwe's public postsecondary system. When other students rallied for the release of their leaders, they too were arrested (O'Malley, 2010). In an act of cultural violence, The University Amendment Act of 1989 amended the nation's constitution to give the government even more control over universities (Hodgkinson, 2011). Chikwanha (2009) wrote that the Act was perceived by many as an instrument to breed "an educated patriotic class that was desired by the regime" (p. 81). When University of Zimbabwe students protested the Act, the government shut down the university for ten months, leaving students in limbo. The government continued to weaken students' power through legislation that required students in the six state-sponsored universities to provide police with seven days' notice if they anticipated meeting, organizing, or protesting (Schreiner Evans et al., 2012). These political actions suggest that structural violence was a typical response to student activism.

In 2007, 4,000 University of Zimbabwe students were evicted from their dorms after protesting student fee increases (Schreiner Evans et al., 2012). Although a Zimbabwean court ruled in favor of the students to move back in, it did not hold the university accountable

for re-opening the dorms (Schreiner Evans et al., 2012). Females were re-admitted two years later, followed by males another two years after that (Schreiner Evans et al., 2012). Despite Mugabe's rejection of academic autonomy and freedom, faculty and students in Zimbabwe were influential in demonstrating against the government's policies (Chikwanha, 2009). Indeed, Luescher-Mamashela (2011) considers African universities to be training ground sites for democratic citizenship, and Zimbabwe is no exception.

Iraq

Pre-conflict higher education in Iraq was a model for the region (Gusterson, 2011; Harb, 2008). Although access to higher education highly favored males, some women were encouraged to participate in co-education (Ranjan & Jain, 2009). As early as 1969, Iraq appointed a female minister of education, the first Arab country to do so (Jawad & Al-Assaf, 2014). Still, the state of higher education in Iraq was mostly a private affair. Roy (1993) indicated that little was known about Iraq's newest private university, called Saddam University, because it was only open to members of the Arab Socialist party and military officers/candidates. Despite advances, government structural and cultural violence reproduced educational inequities related to access and participation.

Higher education was

deeply affected by sustained conflict, and direct violence against institutions of higher education was rampant. Reddy (2005) reported that 84% of Iraq's higher education institutions were damaged or destroyed at one point. During the course of post-war political instability, over 280 Iraqi professors were assassinated and another 3,200 fled the country—an estimated 30% to 40% of its academic core (Gusterson, 2012; Reddy, 2005). Iraq's University Professors Association reported in 2006 that 80% of assassination attempts on campuses targeted university personnel (Harb, 2008), while other university staff were killed in or around their homes (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014). The large number of safety concerns ethnic fighting, external war, political violence made universities unsafe places.

More recently, the purpose of higher education in Iraq changed its focus from research and teaching to dealing with a variety of the country's issues: mental health challenges, student soldiers, educational isolation, erosion of academic quality, and closures of institutions (Milton & Barakat, 2016; Reddy, 2005). Infrastructure and capacity have also been greatly reduced. By 2003, university facilities were a shell of their prior selves, looters having taken computers, books, desks, and even

electrical wires (Gusterson, 2012). Of the \$1.2 billion Iraq requested from the United States for the post-war reconstruction of its higher education system, only \$8 million was appropriated (Asquith, 2004; Gusterson, 2011). How and if those rebuilding funds were disbursed and used is unknown, but certainly more investment is needed to return to a teaching- and research-focused higher education system.

Educational institutions also lacked stable leadership. One of the most prominent examples of structural violence in Iraq occurred in 2009. Tensions between the president of Al-Mustansiriya University and the government resulted in armed forces invading the campus and making several arrests (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2013). Iraq's higher education minister appointed a new university president and demanded the incumbent president step down. The incumbent president refused, resulting in two officials attempting to lead the university in two separate offices until the minister tried to break the stalemate by appointing a third president. This third appointee was threatened by students with knives and quit a few weeks later (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Iraq's prime minister intervened and appointed a fourth president, whom the higher education minister did not accept as legitimate. The solution involved temporarily shutting down the university (Williams & Mohammed,

2009). This is not just an example of feuding politicians, but an attempt to assert political power by using the university as a political instrument to achieve an agenda, resulting in debilitating blows to university governance and operations.

Structural violence at Al-Mustansiriya University was compounded by cultural violence. Politically- and ethnically-affiliated student groups beat, tortured, raped, and murdered students, professors, and college administrators whose cultural affiliations differed from their own (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Until the university was closed, Shiite student groups received government protection and had input in grading, admissions, and which courses faculty taught (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). The result of this cultural violence is that Iraq's higher education system became fragmented, wherein every campus was segregated by ethnic affiliation, resulting in paranoia that trumped academic freedom and isolated academics along lines of ethnicity (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2013). This display of government-sanctioned sectarian violence not only interrupted the country's post-war peacebuilding process, but also stunted Iraq's academic re-development, a task from which Iraqi academics were largely excluded (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

Reconceptualization of Findings and Discussion

The current higher education systems in Zimbabwe and Iraq can be characterized by a lack of security and academic freedom. Each country was ruled by a single regime for decades, which permitted the state to define the purpose of higher education, choose who participated, and guide the curricula. In both cases, the regimes used higher education as a political instrument, providing little autonomy or security to the university community.

In each country, students and academics were violently targeted and brutalized, often along lines of sectarian and political affiliations. This violence typically occurred as a result of political rivalry or instability, such as regime challenges in Iraq or post-election violence in Zimbabwe. In the case of Iraq, universities were branded by ethnic affiliation, which put faculty and students of different ethnicities at risk of immense personal danger. Activism also resulted in a strong governmental response. Zimbabwe had a strong presence of student activists who, despite state responses, continued to reject increases in student fees, unfair university practices, and oppressive state educational policies. Direct violence frequently illuminated structural violence, such as when Mugabe had viewers of Arab Spring videos arrested, tortured, and jailed with exorbitant fines. Protests in both

countries were often met with counter-violence, and ultimately faculty and students suffered because of university closures, restrictions on academic freedom, and personal danger.

However, educational differences between the countries are also apparent. Zimbabwe had a heavy presence of student and faculty activists since its independence, many of whom were arrested by the government in acts of direct violence. Mugabe engaged in cultural violence to quiet these dissenting voices and passed legislation to use higher education as means to create a citizenry that was useful to his radical nationalist agenda. In this analysis, consequences of student protests appeared highly gendered; fewer female students engaged in student politics, providing them with some privilege during times of violence, such as access to dorms when males were barred. Indeed, Mugabe's desire to weaken student and faculty power suggests he feared democratically-educated citizens, males in particular.

Iraq's postsecondary challenges have different historical roots. What was once the most advanced higher education system in the Middle East in the 1960s and 70s became strained under Hussein's politicized purpose of education and was further decimated from constant external and internal violence (Harb, 2008).

Iraq has had to deal with long-term conflict, particularly wars that lacked subsequent rebuilding efforts. Internal conflicts also rattled the education system. Political and ethnic groups used institutions of higher education as a tool for their advancement, eroding academic freedom and autonomy. These acts of structural and cultural violence, in turn, led to extreme direct violence. In Iraq, safety and security remains a foremost concern, prompting many academics to have fled the country. The longevity of political attacks on higher education mirrors the country's long-term strife; as of 2019, The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack labeled Iraq a "heavily affected" country with 500-999 documented attacks on the education system, a classification it has retained for years (Kapit, 2018, p. 32).

In summary, the historical contexts of both countries provide a clearer picture of political attacks against higher education. Zimbabwe's government used higher education as a means of political indoctrination: when these efforts failed, faculty and students were arrested to dissuade further dissenters. Retaining power was a key factor in these attacks on higher education. Iraq's government not only experienced internal struggles, but also faced conflict from external sources. Here, direct violence was legitimized by long-standing conflict, and murder of academics was all too common. The consequences of ethnic, political, and cultural power

conflicts ultimately resulted in ethnic segregation, erosion of academic freedom, and personal danger.

Generalization of Findings and Recommendations

Political attacks on higher education have rippling impacts. Such violence can affect local, regional, and global relations and urgently requires international attention and cooperation. This paper concludes with implications and recommendations for global leaders and policymakers, international agencies, university leaders and faculty, teachers, and researchers.

Global leaders must do more to protect higher education from being used as a political instrument. According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, more attacks on education occurred globally between 2013-2017 than 2009-2012 (2014, 2018a). State leaders must publicly commit to protecting schools and universities from violence. One way to do this is through the *Safe Schools Declaration*. Since its 2015 inception, 86 countries have endorsed the intergovernmental Safe Schools declaration, pledging to protect schools from militarization, provide support and assistance to schools and victims, and engage in “conflict

sensitive” educational practices (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2018, n.p.). The United Nations has urged member countries to pledge and follow the Declaration’s set of guidelines for establishing and maintaining safe schools (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2019). This endorsement can help legitimize schools and universities as safe places even during times of conflict. As a result of pledging, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, New Zealand, Denmark, and Democratic Republic of the Congo have reported policy changes or peaceful resolutions to situations involving schools (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2019). While Iraq recently endorsed the Declaration, Zimbabwe has not.

With help from peacebuilding agencies, international aid agencies must push leaders of both countries to make cultural tolerance, inclusion, and diversity appreciation at the core of its educational curriculum across grade levels. This will help to ensure civil responses to future election outcomes, which have historically been met with violence. For example, Zimbabwe entered another era of political and educational uncertainty due to a recent regime change, and Iraq’s current ruling regime has been violently contested. Because post-war conditions often include threats to academic freedom, personal safety, and a high probability of conflict

continuation, sustained financial assistance is needed to restore higher education infrastructure and security (Milton & Barakat, 2016). Students, academics, and university facilities are still at risk in these and other conflict-ridden countries.

International, regional, and local communities must advocate, when possible, non-violent activism. Non-violent acts of resistance can be powerful and include sit-ins, blockades, strikes, and general non-cooperation (Schmid, 2014). Academic activists must be careful not to accept violence as the first and only solution and consider alternative methods capable of achieving their objectives when possible. Protections in the form of aid and/or sanctions may be necessary to encourage non-violence and deter counter-violence. When political attacks against higher education occur in response to peaceful protests, international bodies must provide support for investigations and call for state accountability.

At an educator- and administrator-level, university and school staff need to be aware of political attacks on education and the various forms those attacks take. Even in states that are relatively peaceful, structural and cultural violence may be prevalent. In states of conflict, educators must be prepared to address direct forms of violence. For example, UNESCO

(2016) released both a teacher's guide and administrator's handbook for the prevention of violent extremism. This unique teacher's guide offers advice on delivering key messages and managing classroom discussions, while the handbook provides information on teacher training, school interventions, and partnerships (UNESCO, 2016, 2017). Utilization of these resources can potentially deter extremism in adolescence and early adulthood. Further, university administrators must develop and disseminate crisis response plans to help protect the university community. Several organizations provide guidelines for developing crisis plans, including strategies for communicating, responding, and recovering from various incidents (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Up-to-date crisis plans are extremely important, even in peaceful environments, because non-violent protests may be met with violence without warning.

Finally, more research is needed on various issues related to political attacks on education. There is a schism in findings looking at the impact political oppression has on violent extremism. Some reports suggested participation in higher education can prevent violent extremism (O'Malley, 2014; UNESCO, 2016), while empirical research indicated educated students are just as likely to participate in anti-government direct violence (Aghedo,

2015). Having a better understanding of the effects of higher education on the formation of extremist ideologies can inform more relevant interventions. Additionally, more research is needed on political attacks on higher education in general. Studies that focus on elementary and secondary school violence are more abundant, possibly due to the oft-compulsory nature of this level of schooling and the vulnerability of younger students. Furthermore, there are limited examples of comparative empirical studies such as this one. Information about political attacks on education in various countries typically takes the form of individualized narratives that do not attempt comparisons. Comparative research can help global leaders and agencies better understand differences in contexts because one-size-fits-all solutions may not work.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the lack of peer-reviewed empirical research regarding political attacks on higher education in these two countries. All other sources of data accounted for three times the amount of empirical research collected and analyzed. Potential reasons for this gap include possible obstructions to academic freedom, lack of access to information, and

explicit danger in researching this topic. Therefore, empirical literature was primarily used to situate the problem and provide a conceptual framework, rather than explore particular political attacks or motives. In addition, the author could only analyze documents written in English, which may have narrowed the scope of data collection. Beredy (1964) argues that educational comparativists should understand the native language of the country under examination, as well as be deeply rooted in its cultural and political environment. As an American-born citizen who has not traveled to either country, the author acknowledges that this research was conducted from an emic perspective, which can be steeped in ethnocentrism, despite reflective practices (Phillips, 2006). Findings should be therefore be considered with these limitations in mind.

Conclusion

Violence against the academy has implications for the entire system of higher education. Political attacks against education take many forms, some of which are less visible and may even appear normal. It is imperative that global leaders, policymakers, international agencies, educators, and researchers be aware of how political attacks manifest, as they threaten not only institutions but also employees, students, and citizens. Using two exemplar countries, this paper described

several types of political attacks against higher education and provided implications and recommendations to urge nonviolence in local, regional, and global educational systems.

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About the Author

Stephanie Lezotte is a Ph.D. candidate at Rowan University, concentrating in Postsecondary and Higher Education. She studies organizational theory and policy, particularly structures and systems that perpetuate inequity. Her research interests include organizational culture and change, policy, and STEM education.