

Higher Education in Iraq under Attack

**An explorative study on the political violence
against academics and the higher education system
in the conflict in Iraq**



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إذا سقط الجمل كثرت السكاكين

“If the camel falls down, knives abounded”

Arabic saying used by respondent 4 as a metaphor
for the current state of Iraq

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Author's foreword

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1. Introduction

On the 11th of July 2003, shortly after the US invasion of Iraq, Human Al-Din Ahman Mahmoud, an Iraqi academic in educational sciences at Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad and head of department, was killed¹. Sadly, his case was already preceded by several other cases of assassinated academics, and many more were yet to come. Human Al-Din Ahman Mahmoud is a randomly picked name of the long list of academics that have been killed since the US occupation in May 2003, after which academics started to be specifically and deliberately targeted through various forms of political violence (O'Malley 2007). It is estimated that almost 300 academics have been killed since the occupation, and they faced many additional violations of their rights such as forced displacement, detention, death threats and abduction (O'Malley 2007:8). The exodus of intellectuals since 2003 as a result of the violence and the threat thereof is of an unprecedented scale (Weiss Fagen 2007:4, Harb 2008:5). Moreover, the political violence continues to be employed against academics until now, and seems to be targeted at the whole higher education sector in general. Despite having lost some of its intellectual dynamism and independency after the rise of Saddam Hussein to power in 1979 and the total embargo on the country after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in the '90s, Iraq's higher education system used to be a well-functioning system up until 2003 (Harb 2003). But with the US occupation, much of higher education's infrastructure was destroyed, academics were dismissed from their posts, and the higher education system has come to be organized along sectarian lines and is increasingly politicized, making the circumstances under which academics work more strenuous and causing a gross impediment of academic freedom (Cordesman 2006:40-41, Jawad 2007:521-524, Harb 2008:5). These alarming developments occur in an Iraq in which a persistent conflict rages. The current Iraq is torn due to the continued violence throughout the country. Under the lead of the US, a struggle for political power and control in Iraq has evolved between many different groups, including the US itself (Tripp 2004, Erdbrink and Roelants 2007). This has placed an enormous burden on Iraqi society and its people (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007) and has fuelled a conflict that has caused the disruption of the social fabric of Iraqi society (Tripp 2004, Erdbrink and Roelants 2007). Higher education seems to have suffered disproportionately as a result of the conflict. Academics appear to be particularly vulnerable in the newly created context of political violence against them and the higher education sector as a whole (O'Malley 2007:8).

¹ <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/academicsList.htm>

The question rises what this political violence entails exactly: is it specifically and systematically targeted at academics and higher education, in which ways, and perhaps most importantly, why and by whom? Surprisingly, little empirical research has been conducted on the exact scale and nature of this political violence and many of the stories and figures remain anecdotal. In addition, the reason for or rationale behind the specific and systematic targeting, i.e. the dynamics of political violence, remains even more unclear (Harb 2008:5). Although the issue is increasingly acknowledged as a serious problem that needs to be addressed, the precise scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against Iraqi academics remain largely unknown (O'Malley 2007). Furthermore, the sources that bring the problem to the fore often tend to overlook or insufficiently address the root causes of the current plight of Iraqi academics, as well as the large impact that the politicization and deterioration of higher education might have on the reinforcement of violence and conflict and on the Iraqi society as a whole.

From a theoretical perspective the topic is also a challenging one. There is a growing recognition of the widespread phenomenon of political violence against the education community and a growing consensus on the importance of determining the complex relationship between conflict and education (O'Malley 2007, Davies 2004, 2005). It is widely acknowledged that to address conflict it is of the utmost importance to also address education and vice versa: conflict and violence are argued to impact on education and education is argued to impact on violence and conflict (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008, Davies 2004, 2005). The existing literature on education and conflict reveals that education can either exacerbate or mitigate violence and conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, Davies 2004, 2005). Nevertheless, relatively few studies are available on the topic and even less on the specific topic of the how, what and why of political violence against academics and possible solutions to tackle the problem (Novelli 2008:7), thus leaving a theoretical gap that needs to be filled and with respect to the Iraq case a practical problem that needs further exploration.

This study attempts to make a contribution to theory and practice by respectively shedding some light on the precise relationship between education and conflict and how political violence fits into this, and on the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against Iraqi academics. As discussed, the Iraqi case is exemplary for the widespread and profound political violence against academics and its analysis may therefore provide useful insights to further theoretical knowledge. This underlines the theoretical importance of this study in elaborating theoretical knowledge on education, political violence and conflict. However, and more importantly, the study is also highly relevant from a practical and humanitarian point of view, for it is of the utmost importance that the political violence against academics in Iraq and its relation to education and conflict is

made more insightful so it can be more adequately addressed and solutions can be identified to tackle the problem. More thorough and detailed knowledge about the features of, rationale behind and impact of the political violence against academics in Iraq is required, because with this essential knowledge it is hoped that this disturbing phenomenon will be more fully acknowledged. In this way, this study seeks and hopes to make a humble contribution to putting a halt to the continuation of inflicted harm on Iraqi academics and the Iraqi higher education system.

The central question of this study is:

How do Iraqi academics perceive the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against them in post-2003 occupied Iraq and how do they perceive the relationship between the current conflict situation and higher education?

To find an answer to the central question and on the basis of the discussed literature, three main subquestions were formulated. Broadly, these were guiding in this research:

- What is the perceived impact of the conflict and political violence on higher education in Iraq?
- What are the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of the political violence against academics in Iraq?
- What is the perceived impact of higher education on the conflict and political violence in Iraq?

This study reviews the existing body of literature on education, conflict, political violence and contains the results of an elaborate and explorative empirical research into this topic in Iraq. The empirical research was conducted in Jordan and Syria from February 2009 until May 2009 among Iraqi academics who have fled Iraq and have found refuge in Jordan and Syria. Because of the explorative and sensitive nature of the research, an open approach was made use of. The focus was initially on in-depth semistructured interviews with a largely open character, but when it became clear interviews would not provide enough data due to the difficulties encountered in finding a sufficient amount of interviewees, a questionnaire was developed and distributed. In total 12 interviews were held with and 12 questionnaires were completed by Iraqi academics.

The outline of this thesis is as follows. First, chapter 2 discusses the relevant literature on the nature of conflict and political violence, on the impact of conflict on education and the role of political violence in this, and on the (potential) impact of education on conflict, i.e. how education might reinforce or mitigate violence and conflict. Then, chapter 3 provides background information on the current conflict in Iraq, and on what is known so far about higher education and political violence in the current conflict situation. In chapter 4 the exact methods and techniques applied in this research are described. In this chapter the conceptual model on which this research is based is composed and the research question and subquestions are explained. Furthermore this chapter includes a description of the methods of data collection, the ethical considerations in and limitations of this study, the operationalization of concepts and the techniques of data analysis. Next, the results of the empirical research are analyzed and discussed in three different chapters. In each chapter one of the three main research subquestions is answered. Chapter 5 discusses academics' perceptions on the impact of the conflict and political violence on higher education in Iraq. Chapter 6 contains the findings on the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against Iraqi academics, and in chapter 7 it is laid out what academics believe the (potential) impact of higher education on the conflict and political violence in Iraq is nowadays. In the concluding chapter 8 the major findings are laid out again and put in perspective. Based on the findings of this study as well as on its limitations, this chapter includes recommendations for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The field of education and conflict still is a “field in its infancy” (Tomlinson and Benefield 2005:341), but the body of literature on the topic is growing, as is attention given to the topic by policymakers, practitioners and the international community in providing international aid in general. This is mainly for two reasons: first, because of the increased attention paid to armed conflicts over the past few decades, the increased involvement of actors around the globe and the perception that civilians are increasingly targeted in these, and second because of a growing acknowledgement of the vital role education can and already does play in (post-)conflict situations. This chapter gives an overview of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature about the education-conflict interface. The first section (2.1) discusses what the nature of contemporary conflicts in general is considered to be in the literature (2.1.1), including the role and place of political violence in this (2.1.2). Section 2.2 contains a discussion of the literature on the impact of conflict on education. This concerns the place of education in conflict (2.2.1) and political violence harnessed against the education sector (2.2.2). Next and alternatively, section 2.3 discusses the impact of education on conflict. It outlines the relationships between education on the one hand and conflict on the other from two different theoretical approaches: first in the sense that education can perpetuate or exacerbate conflict (negative side, 2.3.1) and second in terms of education’s potential for encouraging or building peace (positive side, 2.3.2). It is argued that these two sides of education are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can be present simultaneously, and more importantly are inherent to the nature of education, which implies that no matter how negatively education is impacting on the conflict, it can always be substituted for or modified to its positive side.

2.1 The nature of conflict and political violence

This section discusses the literature regarding the nature of conflict (subsection 2.1.1) and the nature of political violence (subsection 2.1.2). What are the politics of war and violence, how can they be justified, how can they be explained, and how do they fit into the reasons for conflict to emerge in the first place?

2.1.1 The nature of conflict

The era of globalization has changed the world in many ways, not in the least in terms of security and conflict. Security is said to have become much more a matter of global concern for human security rather than state security with conflict no longer being a case of war between states, but of war within states or between groups that are not confined by state borders (Kaldor 2003, Grueters 2008). The changed nature of contemporary conflicts is of great importance here. Contemporary conflicts are different from old wars and the cold war in that a new form of warfare has emerged waged by networks of non-state and state actors using small arms as opposed to purely interstate conflict characterized by large sophisticated weaponry (Kaldor 1999, UNDP 2005). Martha Thompson (2006) gives a good overview of the main elements that constitute these conflicts.

Thompson (2006) argues that first, combat is increasingly privatized², representing non-state actors that want to reshape political and economic power (instead of taking state power) (2006:344). Consequently, because the many different parties involved, she states that the second main characteristic of contemporary conflicts is that power can shift among countries, individuals, systems and organizations (Thompson 2006:344). The political and economic ground of contemporary conflicts is underlined by other scholars as well. Davies (2004, 2005) states that many, if not all, international conflicts are to a greater or lesser extent driven by huge economic interests (Davies 2004:46). With respect to Iraq she argues that ‘there are grounds for why America cites the breaking of UN resolutions in Iraq but not in Israel as a reason for their invasion, and that is oil’ and quotes an anti-war banner in New York which read: ‘How is it that our oil came to be under their sand?’ (Davies 2004:46). Economic systems are produced and reproduced in such a way that it creates categories of the socially included and excluded, both globally as well as locally (Davies 2004:49-52). It creates hegemonies of some groups over others in terms of the distribution of financial means, employment, resources or power (Davies 2005:359). The real or perceived injustices resulting from this can generate war (Davies 2005:359). Politics, and in particular the politics of war, may be harnessed to protect or secure economic interests. These ideas are also compatible with the rational choice theories of war and conflict as discussed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004). Based on an empirical study they conducted they conclude that humans engage in conflict not so much because of experienced grievances, but

² Growing number of non-state actors including militia, paramilitaries, irregular forces, security companies, warlords, and private armies (Thompson 2006:344)

much more because of greed (Collier and Hoeffler 2004:587-589). Humans are 'economic agents' who seek to maximize profit, which serves as a legitimization for their initiation of or involvement in war or conflict (Collier 1999). Again, the dimension of politics and power comes strongly to the fore, for it is through the harnessing of politics to maintain power that economic interests are defended.

The third characteristic of contemporary conflicts as distinguished by Thompson (2006) is that violence against civilians is a deliberate strategy of control. That is, contemporary conflicts are not so much caused by poverty or failure of development (or grievances), but by local and regional power elites that explicitly employ shrewd strategies to gain and maintain power (or greed) (Thompson 2006:344). Bush and Saltarelli (2000) state that in contemporary violent conflicts, and especially in ethnic conflicts, 'the principal weapon of war is terror' and 'not only do warriors target civilians [...] systematically, but they employ control through the creation and manipulation of fear' (2000:4). This pinpoints that armed groups exerting control through the creation and manipulation of fear is an important mechanism through which conflict can be initiated and perpetuated. Another way in which this might occur is mentioned by Thompson (2006) who states that elites may use ethnicity and religion as ways to mobilize populations into war. This touches upon the mobilizing of identities for conflict. Davies (2004, 2005) provides some useful insights in how this exactly works. She argues that a society characterized by pluralism and hybridity has a large 'potential for politicization of conflict' (Davies 2004:74). It is more of a cause of internal fighting than of inter-state wars, what makes it highly significant for this research because the current Iraqi conflict is often thought to have a largely internal character, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In case the pluralist character of a society is not adequately accommodated for, the outcome will be polarization of society and politicization of identity and group (Davies 2004:75). If identity is placed at the center of attention and collective identities are defined through certain common characteristics in a negative way, it produces segregation by stressing 'otherness' and may mobilize identities for conflict (Davies 2004:74-78). This holds especially when a linear exclusive identity is attempted to be imposed, while individuals' own perception of their identity is often composed of multiple identities and, more importantly, multiple loyalties (Davies 2004:79). Collective identity can pose serious threats to the cohesion and mere survival of a country. Cockburn (1998) very accurately describes how powerful identity politics can be:

'It is through the creation of collective identities that ethnic and national movements, and the land-right claims they make, gain their force. The discourses emanating from

influential social sources, such as intellectuals and the media, compellingly hail individuals as nationals –‘you are one of us’- at the same time making it clear who is ‘other’. They mobilize culture, tradition, religion, and notions of history and place to evoke a sense of unity, an ethnic or national identity.’ (Cockburn 1998:10)

It is an important notion that institutions such as tradition, culture and religion are harnessed to create a common identity as apart from and opposed to other groups. Thompson (2006) states that it is mainly religion and ethnicity that are used to accomplish this.

In conclusion: these three main characteristics imply that first and foremost conflicts contain a highly political dimension; they are rooted in power relations and based on the political struggle for power and control. Therefore, as Thompson states, an understanding of the political economy of war and the actors for whom war is a viable and profitable concern, is essential (2006:344). Equally essential is to determine exactly how it is that actors perpetuate or exacerbate conflict. Based on the insights gained from the discussed literature it can be concluded that mechanisms used to perpetuate and exacerbate conflict include armed groups exerting control through the creation and manipulation of fear and armed groups using religion and ethnicity to mobilize identities for conflict.

While the underlying mechanisms of conflicts can be divers and overlapping, its manifestations often share one and the same characteristic: it is manifested violently. It has also been demonstrated that conflicts are about politics and power; hence, the political element in discussing violence is of central importance. The next subsection discusses the nature of this political violence.

2.1.2 The nature of political violence

Violence is harnessed by many different groups in many different contexts, but mostly it is used as an instrument of power (Robinson 2008:272). Groups use violence to reinforce their status or position, or to gain access to something they were previously excluded from. In this study the focus is on political violence. Zwi and Ugalde (1991) distinguish four main types of political violence:

- Structural: resulting from the maldistribution of resources and political power.
- Repressive: by the state or others in which social groups are targeted because of their religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, etc.

- Reactive: a reaction against the repression experienced, or conversely by privileged groups against reforming government.
- Combative: the use of force to preserve or gain power, possibly linked to outside intervention (Zwi and Ugalde 1991, in Davies 2004:11).

Although the authors acknowledge there is considerable overlap between these types, it seems a somewhat arbitrary categorization. For instance, why is ‘possible outside intervention’ only linked to combative political violence? Additionally, it remains unclear why the specification of type of actors is confined to repressive violence only. Finally, it has been argued before that all violence stems from an uneven distribution of resources and power (which is how structural violence is defined here) and all violence is to some degree harnessed to preserve or gain power in some form (here the definition of combative violence). A more inclusive and accurate definition is provided by Steinhoff and Zwerman (2008), according to whom political violence “is a broad term for deeply contested actions, events, and situations that have political aims and involve some degree of physical force” (2008:213). A categorization that does seem useful for this study is that of Jamil Salmi (1999, 2000). Although his categories refer to violence in general, they can be easily applied to political violence as well.

- Direct violence: deliberate injury to the integrity of human life, referring to physical acts such as murder, rape or forced resettlement.
- Indirect violence: indirect violation of the right to survival, refers to violence by omission such as the lack of protection against poverty, hunger or of victims of persecution.
- Repressive violence: deprivation of fundamental political rights, refers to human rights violations such as violation of freedom of thought, speech or religion.
- Alienating violence: deprivation of higher rights, such as psychological, emotional, cultural or intellectual integrity, like racism, cultural repression or living in fear. (based on Seitz 2004:51 as quoted in Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008:480 and as quoted in Davies 2004:11)

Both in conflict and post-conflict situations, violence is a means to gain or maintain power and to have a say in political decision-making, whether locally, regionally or nationally or in terms of political power for particular groups. In this sense, violence can be seen as “an emergent process in the dynamics of protest” (Steinhoff and Zwerman 2008:214). A literature research on the topic conducted by Della Porta (2008) shows social movements that contest the status-quo mostly

come into existence not because of new grievances that emerge, but because of a change in the larger political context that allows them to stand up and be heard. Put differently, the political opportunities, including regime shifts, periods of political instability, or changes in the composition of elites, provide an opening for social movements (Della Porta 2008:223). She continues to say that “exclusive political systems and unstable democracies produce more radical opposition and violent escalation” (Della Porta 2008:223). Other important determinants of political violence that Della Porta (2008) distinguishes are resource mobilization and cultural frames or narratives of violence. In order to organize themselves and to mobilize support for the course of action they follow, movements have to be able to draw on the necessary resources (i.e. money, weapons, people, knowledge) and to legitimate any violence they use, which is addressed by placing narratives or stories that connect the group’s collective past to their present situation at the centre of attention (Della Porta 2008:225-227). These stories function as the glue of the group and the point of departure for action, as well as the justification for it: “they derive their explanatory consistency and emotional power” from these (Della Porta 2008:226). It is especially at the cross point of different cultural frames that violence tends to escalate, which is compatible with Davies’ (2004) earlier discussed notion of the dangers of exclusive identity-formation. It emphasizes that when evaluating the legitimacy or legitimization of violence the analysis of power relations and the tools of power cannot be ignored (Steinhoff and Zwerman 2008:218), as also stressed by Thompson (2006). To reveal the root cause of a conflict and hence of political violence as one of its main manifestations, the underlying power relations and interests must be taken into account. Furthermore, it implies yet again that violence is not a random instrument but practically almost serves a certain interest or goal and has a very strong well-thought out rationale behind it.

From this section two major conclusions can be derived that are important for this study. First, that violence is a political means to gain and maintain power and more concretely, that *political* violence is a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. Second, that the emergence of political violence is enabled by political opportunities, sufficient resource mobilization, and legitimization through identity politics.

Now that the characteristics of conflict and political violence have been discussed elaborately, it will be enlightened what its linkages to (higher) education are. It will be shown that education and conflict can be mutually reinforcing and are highly interdependent. There are many ways in which this interdependency manifests itself. To start with, the next section (2.2) will elaborate on the impact of conflict on education, followed by a discussion of the reverse relationship in section 2.3: the impact of education on conflict.

2.2 The Impact of Conflict on Education

This section explores in what ways conflict may be considered to have an impact on education. It is discussed what the direct consequences of conflict are in the provision of education (2.2.1) and how political violence as a major manifestation of conflict affects education (2.2.2).

2.2.1 The Place of Education in Conflict

Education is increasingly accepted as one of the building blocks of human development and of humanitarian response in conflict situations in particular (Johnson and Van Kalmthout 2006:3, UNDP 2005:159). This is very evident within the UN system. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has now included education both in the Common Humanitarian Action Plans (CHAPs) that lay out a strategic plan for humanitarian response in a given country or region, and in the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), the UN mechanism to raise funds for humanitarian action³. In 1992 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the UN and non-UN humanitarian partners was established, and also recognizes education as an integral part of humanitarian response⁴. UNICEF is well known for helping to restore and improve education in conflict or post-conflict areas and works on identifying and promoting 'recommended practices' in such areas (Wright 2006:5). Other major initiatives or actors with a specific focus on or call for addressing sound educational practices in relation to conflict include the Education for All Framework for Action of 2000, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the OECD/DAC Fragile States Group (Johnston and Van Kalmthout 2006:3).

It is self-evident that education is not a static institution and is greatly influenced by the political, social and cultural environment in which it is situated. The functioning of educational institutions is a reflection of these larger societal conditions. Understandably, conflict has a huge impact on the way the system is run and on how well it is able to keep functioning. There are several ways in which conflict is detrimental to education. It disrupts the social structure of society, leading to the forced displacement or even death of teachers and pupils/students, or to losses within families that force pupils/students to contribute to the household or other income-

³ <http://ochaonline.un.org>

⁴ www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

generating activities rather than attending school (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008:478). A decreased security situation makes it difficult to reach school safely, or to sit through class safely (Buckland 2006, Wright 2006). Infrastructure, including education infrastructure, is often destroyed leaving the sector without buildings and other material such as curriculum materials. On the longer term this results in large numbers of people who have not completed basic education and even less who have completed secondary or tertiary education, and consequently also in an oversupply of under-qualified and unqualified teachers (Buckland 2006:7). Furthermore, in times of conflict and immediately thereafter in the reconstruction phase spending on education is seriously reduced, if present at all, which further diminishes the provision and quality of education (UNDP 2005:159). Beside these rather apparent and direct linkages, conflict also hampers (the outcome of) education in a more indirect manner. According to the UNDP,

“[education] is not just a basic right, but a foundation for progress in other areas, including health, nutrition and the development of institutions and democracy. Conflict undermines this foundation and also contributes to the conditions that perpetuate violence.” (UNDP 2005:159)

The foundation of a country is even more destroyed if the violence is targeted at civilians in the education sector, as is the case in many of today’s conflicts. Research indicates that the education sector, be it the physical buildings, academics, other educational staff or students, is often specifically targeted (O’Malley 2007, UNDP 2005). The majority of the literature on education and conflict focuses on the delivery of education in conflict or post-conflict situations and mainly on the provision of basic education, but little studies focus on *higher* education and conflict and critical thinking. This study seeks to address these limitations. The next subsection will elaborate on what is known so far about the use of political violence against the education sector.

2.2.2 Political violence against the education sector

It is important to identify what exactly falls within the category of political violence and what does not, for many things can constitute political violence. For the purpose of this study, it is limited to those forms targeted at the education sector. The work of O’Malley (2007) is particularly insightful here. He has conducted a study into political violence against the education sector worldwide, stressing it is a phenomenon of growing concern and calling for immediate action (O’Malley 2007, see also Novelli 2008 and UNDP 2005). Although he recognizes that

actions of violence may differ greatly according to the given context and aims, he distinguishes some common and often occurring forms, according to the tactics involved and the intended effect (O'Malley 2007:13):

- a) Multiple deaths of education workers, students and officials via bombings, remotely detonated explosions and sprayed gunfire in places where large numbers of people congregate, such as university and school entrances, playgrounds and offices, or at largescale events such as protests, or on vehicles carrying staff to and from work.
- b) Targeted assassinations of individual education staff, students and trade unionists by firearms, typically in the classroom or on the way to and from work. Other weapons such as knives and hammers are also used.
- c) Destruction of education buildings and resources via remotely detonated explosions, bombings, burnings, looting and ransacking.
- d) Illegal detention, 'disappearance' or torture of teachers, academics and education trade unionists, usually by forces of the state or forces supported by the state, though sometimes by rebel groups.
- e) Abduction of students, teachers and officials by armed forces for extortion or to spread terror; forced recruitment of child soldiers, and abduction and/or rape of school girls and teachers by military forces.

The conclusion from this entire section is that conflict broadly seems to impact on education in two ways: first, by destroying its infrastructure, which is simultaneously the basic infrastructure or foundation of the country, and second, by targeted political violence against the education sector. It is important to note that O'Malley (2007) incorporates the destruction of educational buildings and resources in his categorization of political violence. Hence, political violence does not only concern the specific targeting of educational staff and students in terms of assassinations, illegal detention, torture and abduction, but also the destruction of educational infrastructure. Finally, political violence against the education sector encompasses the multiple deaths of educational staff or students as a result of the conducted violence in the conflict at large, such as bombings that hit universities. This might be unintentional. This categorization will be the guideline of this study as well, although it is certainly acknowledged that the list is probably not exhaustive. Evidence does show however that most of these forms currently do occur or have occurred in the recent past of Iraq – that is since the invasion of 2003- as will be discussed in the

next chapter. But first, the next section looks into the ways in which education may in itself have an impact on conflict.

2.3 The Impact of Education on Conflict

Education is commonly perceived as something positive in itself. It contributes to an individual's as well as a nation's development and is valued for creating opportunities (Johnston and Van Kalmthout 2006:3). Many national policies as well as international aid projects or even entire organizations focus on or group around enhancing or increasing education. In the Millennium Development Goals, universal education is one of the primary goals to be achieved worldwide in 2015. This section however will illuminate how education may have very perverse effects as well, especially in its relation to conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, Davies 2005). Alternatively, it may also generate very positive effects in terms of peace-building (Bush and Saltarelli 2000, Davies 2005). Educational institutions are understandably greatly influenced by the political, social and cultural environment in which they are situated and play a large role both in passively undergoing or reflecting these conditions and in actively shaping them, either positively or negatively. The two sides of education will be discussed below respectively.

2.3.1 Education and the reinforcement of conflict: the negative side

It is increasingly recognized that education systems can be both 'victim' and 'perpetrator' (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008:478). Not only does the destruction of schools and universities and the problems of attending school in a conflict situation drive pupils/students in the arms of rebel forces and militias because they see no other option (UNDP 2005:159), but education systems may also actively engage in the promotion of violence (Davies 2005:358-359). According to Lynn Davies (2005), education is actually a key player in the perpetuation of violence: "unless we look at schools and colleges and at how, or what, young people (and adults) learn, this spiral into violence and destruction can only continue" (2005:358). Davies discusses various ways in which education can contribute to the roots of conflict. First, education may reproduce inequality by increasing marginalization and social exclusion through mechanisms of biased selection: some groups or individuals from certain groups have more or better opportunities to attend school than others (Davies 2005:359). Second, the dominant masculinity in many countries is often reflected in education, favoring males over females and upholding a culture of toughness, violence and fighting which trickles down to student's attitudes and

behavior (Davies 2005:360-361). Third, education may increase segregation or feelings of 'difference' by transmitting or reinforcing some (collective) identity at the expense of another or others: "identities can be mobilized for conflict, by stressing 'otherness' and eventually hatred or depersonalization" (Davies 2005:361). An important but less visible aspect of this is violence by omission: schools may be reluctant or may refuse to address or tackle violence or intolerance which may be endemic outside the school (Davies 2005:361). By emphasizing difference or ignoring already tense relations between or within groups in pluralist or diverse societies in terms of ethnicity, religion, tribalism or nationalism or a combination of these factors, conflict is fuelled through polarization (Davies 2005:361). Davies states that schools can be engaged in what she calls *war education* in many ways such as directly preparing children or adolescents for conflict (military schools, teaching defense tactics), running schools in a violent manner that teaches students to see violence as a viable option, using a curriculum focused on war and violence or teaching history from a biased, political, or violence-oriented perspective, encouraging competition and testing which creates a fearful population more open to conflict, and finally there is the failure of schools to stimulate critical thinking and teach alternative realities (Davies 2005:362-364). While there is some overlap, the features of conflict-fuelling education as identified by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) are also very worthwhile mentioning here. Their focus is explicitly on education in societies divided on ethnic grounds, but their findings could just as easily be applied to other types of conflicts. What they call the *negative face of education*, or how it can have a socially destructive impact, encompasses:

- The uneven distribution of education as a means of creating or preserving positions of economic, social or political privilege.
- Education as a weapon in cultural repression.
- Denial of education as a weapon of war.
- Education as a means of manipulating history for political purposes.
- Education serving to diminish self-worth and encourage hate
- Segregated education as a means of ensuring inequality, inferiority, and stereotypes.
- The role of textbooks in impoverishing the imagination of children and thereby inhibiting them from dealing with conflict constructively. (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:9-16,34)

In conclusion, this section shows how education can reinforce or even exacerbate violence and conflict in many different ways.

2.3.2 Education and the potential for peace and reconciliation: the positive side

Adversely, education can be harnessed to prevent or mitigate violence and conflict. In their study on the two faces of education in ethnic conflict, Bush and Saltarelli (2000) also extensively discuss this *positive face of education*. Enhancing educational opportunity for all has had a conflict-dampening impact in the United States of the late 1960s with its tensions between black and white (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:16). Another way in which education has proven to curb conflict is in nurturing and sustaining an ethnically tolerant climate, for instance by closing segregated schools as was done in Northern Ireland or teaching about tolerance as part of the curriculum (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:16). Related to this are schools that recognize and actively address the “de-segregation of the mind”: by installing a belief in the idea of de-segregation in students’ minds a fruitful ground for actual desegregation of broader societal practices is created (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:16-17). Other mitigating effects of education are linguistic tolerance in teaching and communicating, the disarming of history, giving voice to heterogeneous identities and addressing the dangers (or dangerous impact) of ethnic prejudice, education for peace programs to contribute to local peace-building capacities, and using educational practice as an explicit response to or explicitly challenges state oppression (i.e. schools in South-Africa admitting black pupils during apartheid) (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:17-21). Davies also gives some examples of schools that have been resilient to the conflict around them and greatly applauds these ‘resilient schools’ or ‘safe schools’ (Davies 2005:364). She too underlines the potential positive effects of peace education programs, stressing they should promote exposure to conflict to enable people to learn from those they disagree with, i.e. actively employ exposure, encounter and experience (Davies 2005:365). A third possibility she mentions is not covered by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) as such: a grassroots control of education based on “participatory, diagnostic, investigative and emancipatory forms of evaluation” that allow for inclusive decision-making and champions “the ideas of dialogue, encounter and challenge [...] to promote positive conflict in educational institutions” (Davies 2005:366). To conclude, this section demonstrates that education has the potential to mitigate violence and conflict, and can do so in various ways.

3. Higher Education, Political Violence and Conflict in Iraq

Based on available literature on the topic this chapter provides background to higher education, political violence and conflict in Iraq. In an attempt to form a foundation to explain or make sense out of the complexity and absurdity of this conflict and the major issues it brings along for higher education, it sets out to put the education-conflict interface in Iraq in some theoretical perspective and to make a start with linking the issue of political violence in Iraq to the theories discussed in the previous chapter. The first section (3.1) contains a brief introduction into the general features of the 2003 war in Iraq and its aftermath. Section 3.2 portrays how the Iraqi higher education system is affected by the conflict and discloses what is known so far about political violence against higher education in Iraq. The section gives a description of the previous and current state of higher education in Iraq, in the light of and in relation to political violence and the conflict at large. The plight of Iraqi academics is central to this final section.

3.1 Background to the Conflict in Iraq

In 2001, the year of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center Towers in New York, the then president of the USA George Bush gave his first warning to Iraq about possibly facing violent action from the US. The matter on which this threat was based was the fact that Iraq refused to allow UN weapon inspectors into its border to conduct investigations into programs of weapons of mass destruction. On November 27th of the next year Iraq did allow the UN inspectors in and Saddam Hussein, Iraq's president, challenged the world to prove his possession of weapons of mass destruction. Although there was no evidence of such practices, and definitely no incontestable or independently verified evidence, Bush declared on the 25th of February 2003 that Saddam was a dictator who built and hid weapons which could enable him 'to dominate the Middle-East and intimidate the civilized world, and that is something we will not allow' (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:14). On the 20th of March he officially declared war on Iraq; to disarm it and to free the Iraqi people from a dictatorial regime. The war had commenced (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:13-15).

From that point onwards things proceed rapidly. On April 9 2003 American troops reached the center of the capital Baghdad, after having taken over large parts of the south of the country. In addition to being ravished by the bombings and the fighting, Baghdad faced an additional burden by the large scale looting that took place after the take-over, as did many other cities.

Remarkably, US troops only protected some specific locations such as the Ministry of Oil, but put no halt to the looting elsewhere (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:39). The American diplomat Paul Bremer was assigned as the highest civil governor or US Governor General of the country, being in charge of the Coalition Provisional Authority or CPA, positioned in Baghdad. The plan that Bremer and his team had to execute was based on the idea that the US had to have a big if not ruling influence in guiding the country through its transition to democracy (Tripp 2004:546-548). Iraq had to set an example for the reshaping of politics across the rest of the region (Tripp 2004:547). It was declared that power was to be located transparently in effective public institutions and the control of oil revenues was to be devolved to local levels (Tripp 2004:546). One of the first decisions Bremer made was to break the power of the armed forces and the security services by sending them home, together with the dismissal of all people who were part of or had ties to the Ba'ath party (the ruling party under Saddam) from any government position (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:40, Tripp 2004:546). This came to be known as the de-Ba'athification process. The firing of the military in particular increased the power of the resistance forces: laying off hundreds of thousands of armed and professional men without any financial or other compensation means driving them straight into the arms of rebel groups (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:78). Charles Tripp comments that these US actions 'undermined the security capacity and administrative capability of the very state the US was claiming to reconstruct' (Tripp 2004:549), and continues to say:

'Daunting as this might seem under present circumstances, in the year before the war and in the war's immediate aftermath, this was not thought likely to cause any major problems. Those who formulated this idea had after all been reassured [...] that the Iraqi population would welcome an American presence and be hungry for all that the US could bring to Iraq. It was based on a rather thin reading of Iraqi society and a series of misunderstandings about how it might interact with the new forms of power being imposed (Tripp 2004:547).'

Six years after the invasion of the US in Iraq, Charles Tripp's comments seem to have been very accurate. If anything, the situation in Iraq has not improved. People live their lives in fear as attacks continue on a regular basis, and foreign troops are still present in large numbers throughout the country. Nor has a stable government been established. Despite claims by the US administration that things have changed for the better, the violence has hardly died down: Iraq still faces a very poor security situation (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:6).

The political situation in Iraq nowadays is a highly complex one. In the first year of the occupation, the CPA assembled an Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), mainly consisting of Iraqis who had lived in exile for years and were considered by many as outsiders unaware of the true needs and wishes of the Iraqi people, or as US collaborators put in charge to implement US plans for the domination and reshaping of Iraq (Tripp 2004:548, Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:40). Furthermore, as part of restructuring the political system of the country, the posts were divided according to religious/ethnic lines because it was thought to accommodate the interests of the different groups in Iraq (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:40). Three main groups form the majority of Iraqi society: Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims and Kurds, an ethnic group inhabiting the Northern region of the country. While the Kurds are undoubtedly part of the larger Iraq, they run their region in a more or less autonomous way, having its own political leaders and fighting forces. It should be emphasized however that these groups lived together for innumerable years and intermingled in every section of societal life (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:6-9). The differences between them were not an issue or a matter of discussion, formally nor informally: all people were regarded as Iraqis and referred to as such (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:97). Nevertheless, it was mainly Sunnis who occupied the most important governmental positions under Saddam, who was a Sunni himself (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:96-97). Both Shi'a and Kurds have a history of trying to oppose or resist Saddam's regime, with the witness of some violent clashes over the past few decades as a result (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007: 48-51). After the invasion alliances with groups representing Shi'a and Kurds were established by the US since these groups were in favor of and shaped their course in accordance with the US course, and it was believed they somehow needed to be compensated for the former regime, although this seems to have been more of an American assumption than an Iraqi belief (Cordesman 2006:14). In the development of a new Iraqi governance system three trends may be distinguished that appear to have boosted the polarization of Iraqi societal groups. First, the US identification of like-minded people for political functions, having enjoyed their education in Western countries and who share broadly secular and liberal values, but who were not perceived as credible representatives by many Iraqis (Tripp 2004:551). Second, the implementation of a political system and constitution marked by the division of posts along ethnic/religious lines, i.e. the official division of Arabs in Iraq into Sunni and Shi'a sects and Kurds, which encouraged segregation for it suddenly paid off to identify oneself as being part of a certain group (Al-Azzawi 2008:6). And third, the fact that the US administration actively sought support of the communal leaders of certain locally organized armed groups, defined by ethnic or sectarian terms, if they could potentially help to maintain order (Tripp 2004:551-552). The failure of the US to adequately address the political vacuum

they created and to establish a strong cohesive national authority, has contributed to the disruption of the social fabric of the Iraqi society (Tripp 2004, Erdbrink and Roelants 2007). Not only did this encourage local formations to emerge, but it also granted them with a substantial degree of power and led to the incorporation of division and separation in governance, as well as to the maintenance of the status-quo until now. This appears to lead to the conclusion that the US had a leading role in encouraging segregation in and polarization of Iraqi society, and is in accordance with the theory that violence is enabled by political opportunities and sufficient resource mobilization, as was argued in the theoretical framework (Della Porta 2008).

The Iraq of today is torn due to the violence between different sets of actors that are fighting each other and in which civilians have become targeted as well. According to a study conducted by Charles Cordesman in 2006, some 23 militias have emerged around Baghdad alone (Cordesman 2006:2). Although the violence is commonly referred to as sectarian violence, implying the violence is a consequence of clashes between groups of different religious or ethnic backgrounds (Cordesman 2006), the division of groups does not necessarily follow the division of Shiites, Sunnis or Kurds. Cordesman (2006) quotes the US Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael Hayden, who can be considered to represent the common opinion of the US administration in general, in his summary of the main interests of the sectarian groups:

- ‘The Shi’a today now focus on assuring that Iraq’s new government reflects the will of the majority of Shi’a population, making sure that the Ba’athists never regain power.
- Sunnis, on the other hand, view the Shi’a as Iranian controlled and the current government as predatory – or at least many Sunnis do.
- The Kurds, for their part, want to keep and strengthen the substantial autonomy they’ve exercised for more than a decade (Cordesman 2006:9).’

Although like Hayden, the media also primarily depicts the violence as intergroup fighting between bounded opposed societal segments, this is a simplified and unjust interpretation of reality, for many acts of violence *within* these societal groups have been witnessed and reported (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:7,9). It falsely depicts the conflict as constituting a civil war, but:

‘Even today, many ordinary people still do not think in terms of civil war. What they see is not neighbor against neighbor but armed thugs on all sides brutalizing civilians (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:6).’

Shi'a groups form so-called militias, directly or indirectly supported by Iran in terms of financial means, arms or manpower (Ware 2005, Mazzetti 2008). Many high-profile people and leaders within these militias had lived in Iran during the Saddam era or have even fought alongside the Iranians in the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s, and many of their fighters today are said to be still trained in Iran (Ware 2005, Mazzetti 2008). One of the strongest Shi'a groups is the Badr-militia, fighting under the leadership of Abdelaziz Al-Hakim, the powerful Shi'a leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq or ISCI (formerly known as the Supreme Court for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI). He has passed away only recently due to cancer on August 26 2009 in Tehran, Iran, and his son Ammar Al-Hakim is most likely to succeed him as ISCI's party leader⁵. A moderate stand within ISCI is voiced by the highly influential cleric Al-Sistani, who has condemned the sectarian violence frequently and forcefully (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:8). Al-Mahdi Army, the militia of the Shi'a religious leader Muqtada Sadr, used to be a strong party in the South up until 2008 (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:199), but from that point onwards many of its operations have been curtailed and the army started to dissolve (Farrell 2008). The third main Shi'a group is the Dawa'a party of Iraq's prime-minister al-Maliki (and temporarily of former prime-minister Ibrahim Jaafari, who later started his own party). In the far north the Kurdish militias or peshmerga's are the ones in power: on the one hand the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of the president of the Kurdistan province Masoud Barzani and on the other hand the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani, the president of Iraq (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:199). Furthermore, there are the Sunni extremist groups that are linked to Al Qaeda, of whom it is unclear under who's command they exactly are in Iraq and what their precise numbers are (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:199, Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:7).

Whilst it is evident that the Shiites and to a lesser extent the Kurds are overrepresented in the government, it is also openly acknowledged that the Kurdish militias now are in full control of the Northern region and that the Shi'a militias have infiltrated or even taken over completely the military and police forces, and many Ministries are exclusively run by Shi'a groups (Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:197,209). Their control has been growing since 2003 and has been extended on such a scale that they practically run the country (Ware 2005, Mazzetti 2008). Sunni extremists linked to Al Qaeda also have a firm grip on the relatively few areas they control. Lastly, there is a large insurgent movement consisting of different groups from different backgrounds that fights the occupation and its allies, one ally of which is the current Iraqi government (Rojo and Varea 2009). Armed groups from all sides have been attacking and continue to attack both officials as

⁵ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8222229.stm

well as civilians from the other side or other groups, which has resulted in forced displacement on such a large scale that the country now seems divided in specific Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish areas where individuals from other groups are excluded (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:8-9). Baghdad is exemplary for this, with its separate Shi'a and Sunni quarters in 2007, guarded by armed militiamen and secured by creating road-blocks and checkpoints on the crossing lines to prevent 'the enemy' from entering unseen or from entering at all, but lately some improvement has been witnessed. The Kurdish region in the North is illustrative too, with its own army, own laws and rules, own elections and own flag.

Al-Khalidi and Tanner (2007) stress that a lot of people had no other choice but to join some of these groups in order to secure their lives, which further increases the problem 'as radical groups gain in power at the local level' (2007:8). They also underscore the increase in intra-communal violence as the groups splinter and local leaders vie for power (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:9). On top of all this the inter- and intra-group fighting, the role of American and other forces in the violence should not be overlooked: being a target in themselves they attempt to rule out the (mainly Sunni) fighters that attack them. The US military operations are marked by the establishment of checkpoints, roadblocks and movement restrictions, the occupation of schools and hospitals as military bases 'blocking access for civilians in affected areas', house-to-house searches, regular excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, and refraining from warning civilians in time before attacks start (Abou Samra 2007:37). Foreign troops thereby represent an additional violent ingredient to the already complex and confusing mix. It is exemplary of the 'deep-seated political divisions in the country' (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:9).

It comes to the fore that the conflict in Iraq is highly political, which is in line with the theory that conflicts nowadays have a fundamentally political character and are characterized by a struggle for power and control (Thompson 2006) as was discussed in the previous chapter. Whether there also are economic grounds underpinning this political struggle, which are argued to be present in any conflict by some scholars quoted in the theoretical framework (Davies 2004,2005, Collier and Hoeffler 2004), is yet to be shown by the analysis of the data in following chapters. The main players in the violence appear to be the US, Iran and several armed groups with different backgrounds and purposes. It also appears that several links exist between different sets of actors. In the previous chapter, Thompson (2006) was quoted in arguing that in contemporary conflicts, power can shift among countries, individuals, systems and organizations. This aspect too appears to be prevalent in the Iraq conflict, with its many different actors and the different connections between them.

The struggle for political power and control in Iraq has placed an enormous burden on its society and especially its people. Despite the overwhelming attention given to the Iraq war of 2003 and its aftermath in terms of mounting violence, the true impact on the Iraqi population and society and the human tragedy that has evolved remains under-exposed (Al Samaraie 2007:942, Ihsanoglu 2007:915-919). According to the UNHCR there are over 2,5 million internally displaced Iraqis and another 2 million refugees who fled to other countries, in particular to Syria and Jordan (Table 1).

Internally Displaced People in Iraq	
Internally Displaced People	2,770,000
Displaced Iraqis in the Region⁶	
Syria	1,200,000
Jordan	450,000
Gulf States	150,000
Islamic Republic of Iran	58,000
Lebanon	50,000
Egypt	40,000
Turkey	7,000
TOTAL	1,955,000

TABLE 1. Displaced Iraqis inside Iraq and in the Region

Source: based on data from UNHCR, January 2009⁷

Beside the fact that every day life is becoming more and more difficult because of a continued lack of electricity, food, clean water, a damaged infrastructure and the daily occurring violence, the social infrastructure (education, health) is also severely damaged (Al Samaraie 2007:933-936, Ihsanoglu 2007:919-923). Ihsanoglu (2007:920) states that: 'The Iraqi state is unable to cater to people's daily needs. A serious consequence is that people may give up working for their future.' There is no functioning civil society, social capital is destroyed by the lack of competent medical and educational personnel and the lack of necessary means, and social cohesion is severely undermined due to displacement in general and especially the physical as well as psychological

⁶ Estimates include recognized refugees, asylum seekers and other Iraqis who may be in need of international protection.

⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html>

separation between particularly Sunnis and Shi'a (Al Samaraie 2007:940, Ihsanoglu 2007:919-920). Al Samaraie (2007) comments on the latter that this disrupts society because for the 'Iraqi society, linked as it is to ethnic and religious ties between tribes and clans and groups or families, [...] these social relations are the glue that binds together these groups and communities to form a nation' (Al Samaraie 2007:940). In addition, Al-Khalidi and Tanner (2007) point out that Iraqi people are weary towards (the labeling of) "sectarian" segregation for they feel it is an artificial and imposed concept, used to accommodate political interests (Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2007:6). It underlines that this conflict is imposed on Iraqi society rather than sprung from or rooted in its basis. From this an important insight can be formulated that will be given high consideration in collecting and analyzing the data as part of the empirical research of this study, namely that it seems that in the conflict in Iraq, sectarian divisions are imposed on Iraqi society. It also highlights that although religion and ethnicity are often perceived to play an important role in the violence, they do not truly: the division along these religious and ethnic lines was not present prior to the occupation at all and seems to be only imposed and harnessed to reach political goals. This is in line with the identified mechanism of perpetuating conflict by using religion and ethnicity to mobilize identities for conflict laid out in the theoretical framework (Thompson 2006, Davies 2004,2005) and shows it is an important point to take into account in collecting and analyzing the data. A final point of interest that emerges from this section is that armed groups seem to exert control through the creation and manipulation of fear, as was argued to be another main mechanism of perpetuating conflict in the theoretical framework (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). This element too can be identified in the conflict in Iraq. According to Al-Khalidi and Tanner (2007): 'radical groups [are] using the violent ejection of entire populations as a tool to assert political power' (2007:8). The mode of operation of US forces points out the US is taking part in this as well.

Although the imposing and continuation of sectarianism already portrays a very grim picture, it becomes an even grimmer picture when one realizes that the political vacuum that has enabled this misery was created by the same US (Cordesman 2006:7, Tripp 2004:557-558) that justified initiating this war on the ground of the threat of weapons of mass destruction and the bringing of democracy and freedom to the Iraqi people: neither of which have turned out to be legitimate reasons, as we now know (Roth 2004). Iraqis have gained nothing from the new political order. Nevertheless, the political struggle does affect the ordinary civilian directly and undeniably, and inevitably draws the population into the politics of war. The next section will dig deeper into what the conflict and violence have brought upon higher education, and specifically how political violence is employed against academics and against the higher education system as a whole.

3.2 Background to Higher Education and Political Violence in the Conflict in Iraq

Iraq's universities flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and its (free) schooling system was long seen as a model of Arab education, fostering the strongest and most liberal educational system in the region (Ihsanoglu 2007:922, Jawad 2007:521, Harb 2008:1-4). Iraq's social capital was widely celebrated: it had a highly developed professional class, a high literacy rate and scored well on the participation of women in all segments of professional life, including the educational sector (Ihsanoglu 2007:919). According to a 2004 evaluation, Iraq fostered two hundred colleges with about eight hundred departments and twenty-eight specialized institutions or research centers (UNESCO 2004). After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, who rose to power in 1979, the UN sanctions and total embargo imposed on the country in response to that have gradually isolated and impoverished the higher education sector and has abolished much of its intellectual dynamism and independency (Harb 2008:1). Lack of international scientific exchange, financial funds for education and a system increasingly being dictated by party loyalty rather than academic freedom and capabilities seriously hampered the many higher education institutions that are present in Iraq and caused an exodus of academics (Al Samaraie 2007:933, Watenpaugh e.a. 2003:18-20, Harb 2008:3-4). Nevertheless, the system was still functioning and the isolation encouraged creative solutions to the enrichment of academic life by the many academics that remained (Watenpaugh e.a. 2003:19). Also, women were very well represented, with the regime encouraging and enhancing their participation and rights in education (Dakkak 2007:39-40). Unfortunately, the US invasion of 2003 to overthrow Hussein has not improved the situation – on the contrary.

The education infrastructure is now severely damaged, which led to a further deterioration of the already poor physical shape educational institutions were in (Al Samaraie 2007:933-934). With respect to universities this entails a lack of material such as housing and curriculum materials, challenges to hold classes due to the unreliable water- and electricity supply, and the perpetuation of lack of international relations and exchange and lack of money to rebuild what was lost (Lawler 2003, Watenpaugh e.a. 2003:6-7, Harb 2008:1-2). Many universities were bombed, looted and burned during the US invasion and the matching military operations (Lawler 2003, Al Samaraie 2007:934). The destruction of many educational buildings and resources seems to have been part of the US strategy to destroy any knowledge related to the development of weapons of mass destruction, even if no direct evidence of a connection to these practices was seriously investigated or found (Lawler 2003). Furthermore, in the direct aftermath of the US invasion, US troops have refrained from putting a halt to the looting of higher education institutions and more

generally have failed to create a safe and peaceful environment for the sector's renewal (Harb 2008:4, Watenpaugh 2004). Together with the strong US dominance in developing new policies and governing the higher education system (as well as the country), this has fuelled Iraqi's antipathy toward American presence and policy (Watenpaugh 2004, Erdbrink and Roelants 2007:76-95). Another contributing factor to the aversion towards the US and to the further breakdown of higher education was the decision of the CPA to dismiss the presidents of universities and deans of faculties as well as most department heads and other academics because of their ties to Saddam's Ba'ath party (Watenpaugh 2004, Harb 2008:5). The large-scale de-Ba'athification process executed right from the start of the invasion in 2003 has had a severe negative impact on the functioning of the higher education system. The fact that party membership was almost inevitable if one was to exercise a profession under Saddam's regime makes that the majority of academics were officially Baathists, although this does not mean they were practicing members or supporters of the regime (Lawler 2003). Either way, in times where the expertise of these people was urgently needed to reconstruct the country and the sector, it negatively affected the relationships between them and what came to be increasingly perceived as the occupier (Harb 2008:5, Watenpaugh 2004).

An important aim of this research is to identify which main challenges academics perceive to be prevalent in the current higher education system as a direct result of the conflict. This aim is given shape in a research subquestion in chapter 4. Here, it is demonstrated that academics seem to have been especially vulnerable in the newly evolved context of few resources due to the destruction of infrastructure and limited opportunities to exercise their functions due to de-Ba'athification. In the previous chapter it was already revealed that destruction of educational infrastructure is an important form of political violence (O'Malley 2007). Here, de-Ba'athification comes to the fore as another important form. In addition, it is hinted at that Ba'athicism may also be a determinant of the political violence because being Ba'athist could be a reason for targeting.

Even though the aforementioned factors pose a great challenge to the survival and/or renewal of the higher education system, an even greater threat is posed by the high levels of insecurity and the violence that stems from the mutual suspicion between and within different groups. It prevents teachers as well as students to reach class safely which leads to large scale absence and the cancellation of classes (Ihsanoglu 2007:922). The main challenge to the higher education system however is the great lack of insecurity for educational personnel *specifically* and the high level of *targeted* violence against them. Academics, but also other educational staff and to a lesser extent students, have been disproportionately and deliberately targeted in assassinations

and abductions and other acts of political violence (O'Malley 2007:8). It is estimated that almost 300 academics have been killed since the US invasion of 2003: 80% of assassination attempts on the country's campuses targeted university personnel and more than half of those actually killed were full or assistant professors (Ihsanoglu 2007:922, O'Malley 2007:8, Harb 2008:5). The Spanish NGO 'Spanish Campaign against the Occupation and for the Sovereignty of Iraq' composed in cooperation with others a list of confirmed cases of murdered academics by name, work affiliations and details of the assassination if available, and list the astonishing number of 295 academics that have been assassinated since 2003⁸. The 2007 report on the attack on the Iraqi education system by Ismail Jalili states that the fear of being murdered was voiced by 91% of respondents (Jalili 2007), but academics' human rights are violated in various other ways too, ranging from death threats, abductions, disappearances and forced displacement to arbitrary detention (O'Malley 2007:8). This provides some useful insights into the different forms of political violence used against academics.

The reason for the specific and systematic targeting remains unclear (Harb 2008:5). Weiss Fagen (2007) argues that besides being a target in their own right for some reason or because of their ethnic or religious background, academics must be careful to avoid being perceived as working with the occupying power, for this might also be a reason to be targeted (Weiss Fagen 2007:4). Though information like this might provide some clues, proper documentation on the purposes behind the violence remains absent. This research aims to shed more light on the prevalent phenomenon of political violence against academics in Iraq. It sets out to identify: first, to what extent political violence against academics occurs (the scale of political violence, i.e. is it systematic and structural), second what the various ways or forms of political violence are that academics have to endure (the nature of political violence), and third why academics are specifically targeted, by whom and with what purpose (the dynamics of political violence). This aim is given shape in a research subquestion in chapter 4.

What has been well documented is another major challenge to higher education: the loss of academic freedom academics and students are facing. With the growing dominance of sectarianism the higher education sector too is increasingly politicized and has come to be organized along the same ethnic/religious lines, making the circumstances under which academics work more strenuous and causing tense relations (Watenpugh 2004, Cordesman 2006:40-41). Jawad (2007), an Iraqi academic who himself fled the country in 2005 after multiple

⁸ http://www.iraqsolidaridad.org/2004-2005/docs/English_list_09_06_15.pdf

attempts on his life, describes how militant groups have taken over universities, labeling it as the ‘re-Islamicization’ of campuses:

‘Nowadays, radicals armed with blind zeal [...] use religion as a means of intimidation [...] imposing an alien and odd reading of Islam (one that challenges the doctrine of Islam itself). Through unabated violence against ideas, carried out on the university campuses, they are rocking the whole educational system. [...] They bully independent thinking and secular scholars, in many cases, even murdering them and terrorizing those who remain (Jawad 2007:522).’

It appears the militias that occupy universities and surrender them to their control are mainly Shi’a militias (Harb 2008:6, Jawad 2007:522). It has been reported that the segregation taking place in the wider community has trickled down to universities, with Sunni students leaving the predominantly Shi’a University of Baghdad for universities in Sunni areas and Shi’a students leaving universities in Sunnis area for the University of Baghdad (Cancela-Kieffer 2007). Moreover, Jawad (2007) adds that the curriculum has been changed to reflect and accommodate militias’ beliefs, with the elimination of ‘Modern and post-Modern topics and classes [...], often replaced by controversial “historical” and theological themes, to the detriment of students (Jawad 2007:522).’ It is clear that with the far-reaching and dominant influence of sectarianism, the higher education system is becoming increasingly politicized (Jawad 2007:521-524, Harb 2008). The impediment of academic freedom is at the core of this and can be indicated as another important factor to research, especially because academic freedom is not distinguished as a factor of importance as such in the discussed literature. Clearly, the violence and conflict have a large impact on the opportunities for academic freedom. What exactly the role and place of academic freedom is in political violence and the conflict at large, is yet to be found out and to make a contribution to this is one of the aims of this research.

The exodus of intellectuals since 2003 as a result of the violence and the threat thereof is of an unprecedented scale (Weiss Fagen 2007:4, Harb 2008:5). With this braindrain a great deal of knowledgeable and experienced experts is lost, and their positions are filled by teaching assistants or people who are unqualified altogether (Al Samaraie 2007:934). Those who have remained face the hardships of too little resources, the impediment of academic freedom, and the constant threat of killings and other forms of violence. It leaves an entire Iraqi generation without sufficiently qualified teachers and future opportunities. All this seriously hampers an independent well-functioning higher education system (Watenpaugh 2004, Harb 2008). As Harb (2008:4) stresses

with respect to higher education: “In fact, the situation is in many ways worse today than before the invasion, with preexisting structural problems exacerbated by the disruption, violence, and shortages of the post-invasion years.” To bring these disastrous and continuing phenomena to an end is not only of the utmost necessity from a humanitarian point of view, but is also crucial to any stable or peaceful future for Iraq. As Jawad (2007) notes:

‘In this painful reality, rescuing our scholars has become as crucial in determining the future of Iraq as disarming the militias. Only with qualitative universities will we be able to rebuild our country and provide an incubator for a new nation [...]. Indeed, if there is to be any hope of “victory” in Iraq, we may ultimately view it as the ability to restore Baghdad to its historical role as a home to intellectual greatness, with universities that once again buzz with energy of our culture and the celebration of the human mind (Jawad 2007:524).’

This statement underscores that higher education does not only suffer from the conflict, but might actually play an active role in contributing to it, and alternatively in curtailing it, as was argued by Davies (2004,2005) and Bush and Salatarelli (2000). How then does this work? What are the (potential) ways of higher education to exacerbate or mitigate violence in Iraq? Providing some insights into this matter is another important aim of this research and hence, a research subquestion is formulated on this in chapter 4.

4. Research methodologies and methods

In this chapter the methodologies and methods of the research and the techniques of analysis will be laid out. First the guiding research questions will be laid out, along with the conceptual model that can be composed on the basis of the discussed literature and the gained insights from the background chapter on Iraq (4.1). Second, the research design is discussed (4.2). The choice for research location and unit of analysis is discussed (4.2.1), as well as the type of research employed and in which broader theoretical perspective to research it is embedded (4.2.2). The section ends with an elaboration of the applied methods of data collection (4.2.3). Section 4.3 contains the ethical considerations taken into account while conducting the research, but also in relation to data-analysis and portrayal. Section 4.4 discusses the operationalization of concepts and section 4.5 describes which techniques are used to categorize and analyze the data. Finally, the limitations of and difficulties encountered in this research are discussed in section 4.6.

4.1 Research Questions and Conceptual Model

The literature discussed in chapter 2 emphasized the interdependency of conflict and education and revealed the large role political violence plays in this. In chapter 3 it was demonstrated how these phenomena are specifically and dominantly prevalent in the current Iraq conflict, especially with regard to higher education. It was also argued that relatively little research has been conducted into the exact relationship between conflict, political violence and education, that even less research focuses on higher education and that with respect to the interrelatedness and rationale behind these issues in Iraq in-depth research remains absent altogether.

Now a conceptual model can be created in which the found relationships between the main concepts, as well as their main features, are displayed graphically. This research broadly investigates the relationships between conflict and higher education in Iraq. The relationship goes two ways: the conflict has an impact on (the educational infrastructure of and the opportunities for academic freedom within) higher education in Iraq, and alternatively, higher education can affect conflict (either positively or negatively). Conflict was argued to be determined by armed groups as well as states fighting for power and control and is specified according to the main identified actors who have their part in the perpetuation and (physical) execution of the conflict. Furthermore political violence was distinguished as one the main manifestations of conflict in general, but moreover as a phenomenon specifically harnessed against the education sector. This holds especially for the Iraqi case, and especially in its relation to the *higher* education sector. It

is also the phenomenon on which this research specifically focuses in an attempt to provide more insights into the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence in Iraq, and into its role in the broader context of (higher) education and conflict. Therefore, it is incorporated as a separate field in the conceptual model. Finally, it has been extensively demonstrated that power relations and political interests are at the heart of violence, conflict and everything it leads to. The resulting conceptual model, on which this research is based, is depicted below:

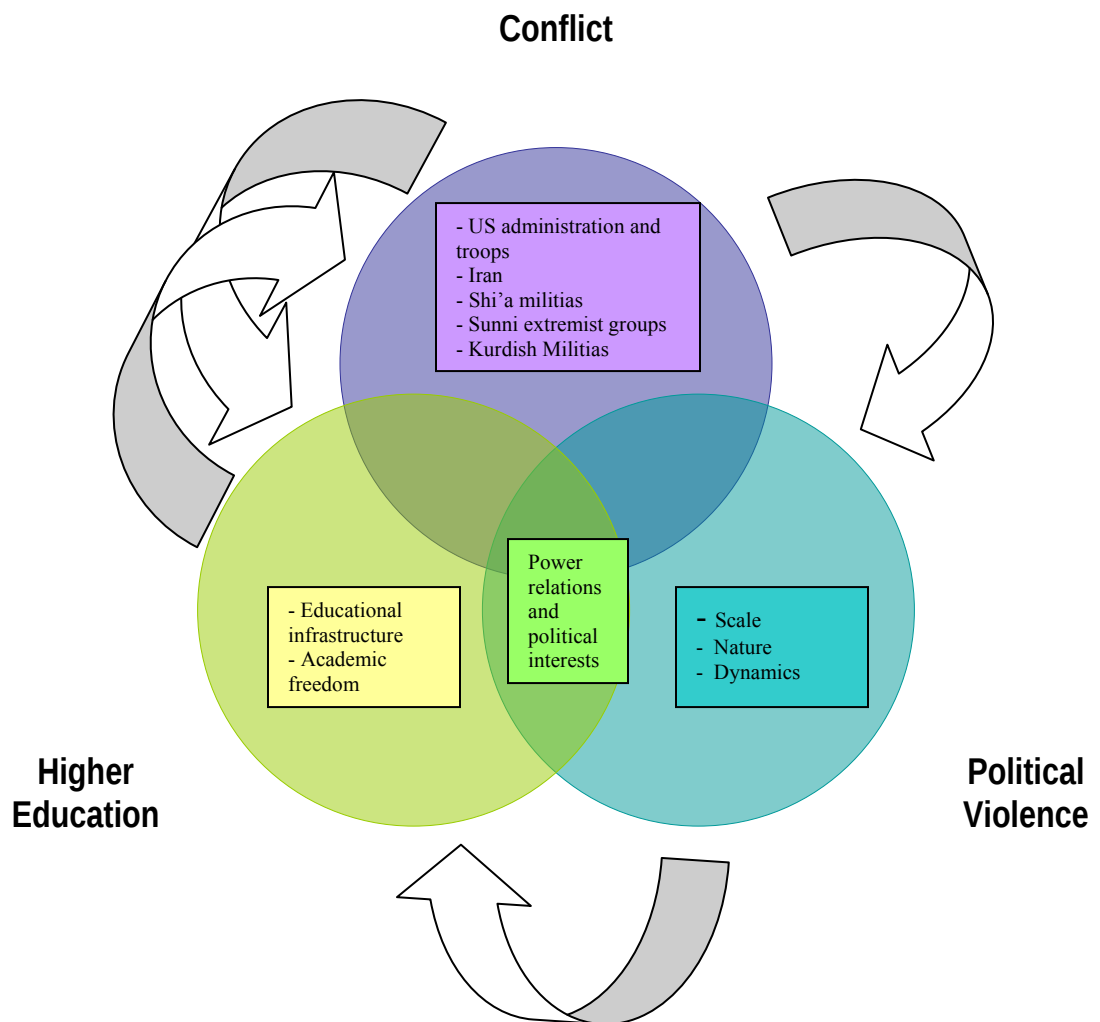


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model

The central question of this research is formulated as follows:

How do Iraqi academics perceive the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against them in post-2003 occupied Iraq and how do they perceive the relationship between the current conflict situation and higher education?

To find an answer to the central question, several subquestions are formulated, based on the found relationships in the discussed literature and specified to the Iraqi case. These subquestions will be answered in subsequent results chapters (chapter 5 to 7).

- What is the perceived impact of the conflict and political violence on higher education in Iraq (chapter 5)?
- What are the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of the political violence against academics in Iraq (chapter 6)?
 - To what extent is political violence against academics perceived to occur (scale, section 6.1)?
 - What are the perceived various forms or means of political violence that academics have to endure (nature, section 6.2)?
 - What is the perceived reason and purpose behind the targeting of academics, what are the factors that play a role in the targeting, and by whom are academics targeted (dynamics, sections 6.3-6.5)?
- What is the perceived impact of higher education on the conflict and political violence in Iraq (chapter 7)?
 - To what extent is higher education perceived to reinforce the political violence and conflict in Iraq (section 7.1 and 7.2)?
 - To what extent is higher education perceived to (have the potential to) mitigate the political violence and conflict in Iraq (section 7.3)?

In these chapters the results of the empirical research are analyzed and discussed. Although it is acknowledged that the different topics under study are highly interdependent and interrelated, for clarity's sake and in order to answer the different research questions the discussion of the results is divided in three broad chapters. The first chapter looks into the perceptions of respondents on the impact of the conflict on the higher education sector (chapter 5). The second chapter displays the results on the perceptions on the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence (chapter 6).

The third chapter digs deeper into academics' opinion on the impact education can and might already have on either mitigating or exacerbating the conflict, and reveals what type of improvements are possible according to them and which ones have priority (chapter 7). Each chapter ends with a conclusion to put the results together and to allow for the evaluation of the (nature of the) interrelations between conflict, political violence and higher education in a comprehensive framework. These subconclusions also discuss which findings can be used to further theoretical knowledge.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Research Location and Unit of Analysis

The research was conducted from February 15th to May 17th 2009 in two countries that host some of the largest numbers of Iraqi refugees, mainly in the capitals: Jordan (450.000) and Syria (1.2 million) (UNHCR 2009). Most of the interviews took place in the capital of Jordan, Amman (6), but also a few in the capital of Syria, Damascus (2) and in Aleppo, a large city in the North of Syria (4). The respondents of the questionnaires also lived in Jordan and Syria, except for one academic who had still not left Iraq and lives in Baghdad.

Information was gathered through Iraqi academics that have fled their country and have now found residence in Jordan or Syria (except for the respondent from Baghdad). The security situation in Iraq is currently too bad to conduct research safely and even independently inside Iraq. The reason to restrict the unit of analysis to Iraqi academics instead of including students and other educational staff as well is because academics are at the core of and central to the political violence: they form a specific target group of political violence, as was discussed before. Furthermore, it can be expected that they have more insight into and a better overview of the dynamics of political violence against the higher education sector because of their close connection to higher education, their wide networks and in-depth knowledge from the experience of a long career in the sector (in any case longer than the average student). An additional advantage is that these people are highly educated which increases the likelihood they can put events in perspective and formulate their arguments well. Finally, academics tend to speak better English than students which eased the interviewing process and which allowed for being able to better communicate the importance and relevance of the study, but also to ensure they understood the anonymity and voluntary nature of their participation.

An effort has been made to assemble a group of respondents as diverse as possible. In total, 24 respondents have participated in this research, from which 12 were interviewed and 12 completed a questionnaire. Respondents came from many different disciplines, ranging from social scientists (amongst others educational, communication, linguistic and business management scientists) to professors in law and in abstract science (amongst others environmental, petroleum and electronic engineering, organic chemistry and computer science). The age range of respondents ran from 30 to 65 years old, with the majority being older than 50: one respondent fell in the age category of 30-40 years old, five in the category of 40-50 years old, 13 in the category of 50-60 years old and four were older than 60. In one questionnaire the respondent did not specify his age. The low number of young respondents is a logical consequence of the fact that people usually do not become professors at young age and that most academics that fled Iraq were from the group that held positions under the previous regime. Four out of 24 respondents were female, the other 20 were male. Although most of the respondents did not specify their ethnic or religious background, some stated they were Sunni Arab, and one was Sunni Kurdish. Finally, the year in which respondents left Iraq varies a lot too, as will be discussed in the next chapter. This allows for different experiences and perspectives to come to the fore. It is not claimed this study is fully representative; rather, the study has an exploratory nature of which the results hopefully lead to a broader research project.

The study focuses on the years from 2003 onwards, since the current situation has emerged as a direct consequence of the US invasion in that year: in terms of political violence against academics and mounting violence and harsh societal tensions in general, and it is incomparable to the period before 2003 when Saddam Hussein was still ruling the country. Although respondents were asked to briefly sketch the state of higher education before the US invasion of 2003 because it provides useful background information to thoroughly understand and contrast that to the situation of today, the questions used for data collection focus on 2003 and the following years, up to and including (the first half of) 2009.

4.2.2 Research Methodologies

This research is embedded in a constructivist epistemology. From this perspective, knowledge and meaning is understood as being socially constructed: there is no objective truth to be discovered, but there is a reality outside human thought, to which meaning is attributed through interaction between subject and object (Crotty 1998:12-13). Hence, “different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty 1998:13).

The theoretical perspective used is a combination of interpretivism and critical inquiry. The former's key notion is that knowledge is constructed through interaction and hence it looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world as an outcome of that interaction (Crotty 1998:67). How the political violence to be researched will be interpreted and explained by respondents, and how the larger impact of this on higher education and vice versa will be explained is expected to depend on the specific experiences and backgrounds of the individual respondents, even more so because individuals from different disciplines or varying years of being outside Iraq might understand it differently. Therefore the focus is on *perceptions*: the perceptions of the respondents are central to this research. That also implies that in looking for common patterns when analyzing the data the researcher's own understanding plays a role. The theoretical perspective of critical inquiry considers the underlying implicit power structures that shape knowledge and meaning-construction. It allows for a critical reflection of social reality and for the power relations in human society to be taken into account. This is of particular interest in this study for it was argued that political violence is mostly used as an instrument of power and the nature and scale of the violence as well as its underlying rationale are expected to reflect the existing power relations and structures.

The research methodology that was used to carry out the research is that of a case study. A case study encompasses the exploration of a bounded system in place and time (i.e. political violence and higher education in post-2003 occupied Iraq) in which the systematic study of a contemporary phenomenon through the use of multiple sources of information and by applying multiple techniques, is central (Yin 1990:23). It is a form of intensive research in which the emergence, development and complex structure of a phenomenon are described and explained by taking as many variables into account as possible: within a case multiple relations are explored (Swanborn 1996:14). It has a qualitative nature, but also allows for the use of more quantitative data. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were applied in this study. Case study research is especially suited for answering questions of an explorative nature (the 'how', 'why' and particular 'what' questions) and in cases in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 1990:18-23). This research fits into this description very well, as the central question of this study and the formulated research questions laid out in section 4.1 demonstrate. The use of theory to formulate sharper questions and to define the boundaries of the research more clearly is key in case study research (Yin 1990:20). Therefore, despite the research being largely explorative, theory is used as the point of departure.

4.2.3 *Research Methods*

This study combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The methods applied to collect data were in-depth semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, as well as an extensive documentary analysis of multiple sources to collect figures on the scale and nature of political violence against Iraqi academics, and to reveal its implications. The insights extracted from the documentary analysis have been already incorporated in the background chapter on Iraq (chapter 3). Everything from UN and NGO data-bases and reports to journalistic articles and written accounts of personal real-life experiences were taken into account. According to Yin, semi-structured or partly open interviews are better than closed interviews because it gives the researcher the opportunity to trace and uncover the underlying rationale of actions and the relationships between persons and/or phenomena, and it gives the respondent (or “informant”) space to develop his or her own arguments and insights rather than merely reproducing facts and events (Yin 1990:89). In order to ensure this an effort was made to leave as much space as possible for respondents to bring their own vision, arguments and experiences to the fore (see also 4.3). Unfortunately, only three respondents allowed for the conversation to be recorded; with respect to all the other interviews extensive notes were taken. Although it is very common to also include participant observation in case study research, this was impossible because of the poor security situation in Iraq. This limitation has been partially compensated for by using the additional research method of questionnaires. It was initially not planned for to use questionnaires, but when it became clear that persuading people to meet personally for an interview encountered more difficulties than foreseen, it was added as a complementary research method (see also 4.6). Yin underlines that although it is desirable to use as many research methods as possible, he acknowledges that it may very well be possible and sufficient to use only one (Yin 1990:95,97). In this study three methods were made use of: interviews, questionnaires and document-analysis.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic it is of the utmost importance to give priority to the respondents’ interest, safety and convenience. The researcher was fully aware that it may be difficult or painful for respondents to tell their stories and recollect their experiences and has taken that seriously into account. The researcher was well prepared for the interviews to avoid asking irrelevant or ignorant questions. It was clearly communicated that participation was on a

voluntary basis and respondents could end the interview at all times, or refrain from answering certain questions. It was ensured the researcher had the informed consent of all the respondents and the interviews were only recorded if the respondent explicitly approved this. Respondents must feel comfortable which means privacy and comfort of setting were ensured and the respondent was asked to suggest an appropriate venue. The interview process was explained carefully to the respondents, and the respondent was given control, which entails:

- Adjust to the respondent's readiness to speak about certain aspects of his/her experience.
- Do not put difficult questions on top of the interview list and establish respectfulness and connection to the person beyond the violation(s) of his or her rights.
- Give the respondent the right to place limits.
- Do not press for answers on difficult questions, do not press for detailed information about traumatic experiences and look for details to establish consistency in more neutral areas.
- Give the respondent the opportunity to ask questions.

Sources: Media Diversity Institute⁹ and Varouhakis 2008

With respect to the role of the interviewer the following was taken into account:

- Be a good listener and use as few interruptions as possible and allow for silences.
- Give respondents my full attention, maintain eye contact and avoid distractions: switch off mobile phones, ensure beforehand the voice recorder works and is charged, ensure clear agreements about the role of a possible translator.
- Dress neutrally, do not exhibit any national or religious emblems, logos or statements.
- Avoid making any facial expressions or verbal comments that show pity, horror or grief but show sensitivity and respect.
- Do not trivialize respondents' experiences or ask invasive questions, and control emotions.

Sources: Media Diversity Institute¹⁰ and Varouhakis 2008

⁹ http://www.media-diversity.org/articles_publications/interveiwing%20%20victims.htm

Finally, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. This encompasses:

- Maintaining confidentiality of data/records (ensuring the separation of data from identifiable individuals);
- Ensuring those who have access to the data maintain confidentiality (in case of this research the persons who have translated during interviews or have translated questionnaires);
- Anonymising individuals and/or places in the dissemination of the study to protect their identity (Wiles e.a. 2006).

4.4 Operationalization of concepts

In order to find an answer to the formulated research question and subquestions, it has to be operationalized how the different phenomena and the relationships between them are measured. This section discusses which questions were used to disclose information on the topic and its different elements and to reveal underlying relations. It has to be emphasized that the list of questions asked to respondents has changed a lot during the research process, and that there is a major difference between the interviews held and the questionnaires completed.

Though the content of the interviews differed greatly according to the willingness (and sometimes pace of talking) of respondents to disclose information on particular topics, an interview guide was developed which contained the main topics to be discussed. The interview guide is attached in the appendices. A clearer overview of the particular questions asked can be derived from the questionnaire, which was developed while in the field. In the questionnaire the insights gained from earlier conducted interviews were incorporated, such as the questions about impunity for perpetrators of the violence and the factors that had to change before academics considered going back to Iraq, which had not been part of the interview guide at first.

First, some personal questions were asked to position the respondent in the conflict, namely why and when they had left Iraq, what their academic field or discipline was and what their age was. Ethnicity and religion were part of the initial questionnaire, but this question was first of all not answered by respondents and secondly perceived to be insulting and irrelevant, and was therefore removed from the questionnaire.

¹⁰ http://www.media-diversity.org/articles_publications/intervewwing%20%20victims.htm

To determine the impact of the conflict of higher education (first subquestion of the research), respondents were asked to identify what in their opinion the main changes to and main problems of higher education since 2003 were, and what had been and is now the role of higher education in Iraq. They were also asked to specify the main challenge for academics since the invasion. This gave room for them to elaborate on several fronts on the impact of the conflict on education, to voice problems independently without being biased by questions in which the problems were already explicated, and it ensured they had more than one opportunity to discuss the impact to prevent information from being left out.

The next set of questions groups around political violence (second subquestion of the research). To reveal the scale of political violence, respondents were asked to comment on the statement that academics were being targeted *specifically* and *systematically* and were given the question if some academics were being more targeted than others. With respect to the nature of political violence the question was formulated which means or forms of violence are used against academics. The dynamics of political violence is operationalized in various different questions: the most direct and explicit one is for what reason and what purpose respondents believe academics are being targeted. Based on the theoretical literature and practical sources of information being discussed in chapter 2 and 3 as well as the information given by key informants while in the field, they were then asked to specify the role the following factors play in the violence and to what extent: (a) political conviction, beliefs or position, (b) field of work, (c) connection to past regime, (d) (being perceived as) working with or for the occupational forces, (e) religion and (f) ethnicity. Finally, the last element of the concept 'dynamics of political violence' is who is behind the violence, which is given shape in the question who the academics believe to be the initiators and perpetrators of the violence. This is an important distinction for in many of the interviews it was stressed that the ones fundamentally responsible for the violence to occur may be different from the ones who actually execute it.

A factor not explicitly present in the literature in education and conflict, but very much as an important factor in the discussion of the present reality of higher education in Iraq, is academic freedom. It is operationalized by asking the questions how academic freedom can be defined, if it is currently present and to what extent, and who is controlling the universities nowadays and to what extent. Another factor which is absent altogether in the theoretical framework but came up in practically every interview is the issue of impunity, for which the question was developed whether anything has been undertaken to prosecute or punish the perpetrators of the crimes. This question is also part of the aim to reveal what can be done to improve the current situation, together with the questions of what should be improved in the higher education system (first and

foremost) and what should change for the respondents personally to consider going back to Iraq and resuming their positions.

To shed some light on the impact higher education as it is now has on the conflict at large (third subquestion of the research), respondents were asked if they thought the higher education system now reinforces or exacerbates the violence and/or the conflict (negative side of education) and if they believe education could take the lead in forcing changes upon society and how (positive side of education). Finally, two more questions were added to get some insights on the general impact of the political violence against the higher education sector with respect to the future: what does all this mean for the future of higher education in Iraq, and what does it mean for the future of Iraqi society? These questions serve to double-check if respondents sufficiently explained the education-conflict interface and its importance for society at large. The entire questionnaire is part of the appendices.

4.5 Data-analysis

With respect to data-analysis it is important to note that in qualitative research, collection and analysis of data are not two separated processes that can be followed-up in time but are often taking place simultaneously (Swanborn 1996:112). Although this may complicate the process slightly, the advantage is that the researcher is continuously working with ‘ground material’ instead of with deducted or abstracted data. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview had taken place, most often the same day or the following day. This provided a large amount of detailed, ‘rich’ and complex data. That does not mean that qualitative data cannot be analyzed systematically. Miles and Huberman (1984) and Bijlsma-Frankema and Fortuijn (1997) provide the evidence with their use of the qualitative data matrix. In this matrix the columns represent the units of observation and the rows the themes or variables. The various cells of the matrix do not contain numbers, as in quantitative research, but verbal annotations. This way the researcher gets a good overview of the data without any data getting lost. The qualitative data matrix is the point of departure and the source of information for the results chapters. If containing relevant information, the answers of the respondents were displayed in the matrix exactly as they were given. With respect to the questionnaires, the answers were obviously automatically literally exhibited. In the results chapter many quotes from this matrix are incorporated. The reason that it is not incorporated in the appendices of this thesis is that it contains too much specific information through which respondents could be endangered for they

might be traceable. Bijlsma-Frankema and Fortuijn (1997:456) distinguish between five functions of the data matrix:

- **Obtain an overview of the most important matters or issues the research produces**, through the preliminary reduction of complex and detailed data to its essence.
- **Obtain an overview of the level of inclusiveness or completeness of the data**, through identifying which cells do not contain information. On the basis hereof two possible decisions can be made: (1) to not include certain themes in the analysis, because there are too few respondents who have provided information on the theme, or (2) to decide that it is necessary to collect additional data to compensate for the missing information, by additional interviews or other means of data collection, because this information is essential to answer the research question.
- **Obtain insight in the variation per sub-theme within the wider research theme**, by comparing cells per row. This is the first interpretation in the analysis: it is examined if answers from respondents, although probably differently formulated, may be positioned in some common categories. This allows for the discovering of patterns in the data.
- **Generate hypotheses about the relationships between (sub) themes and between (sub) themes and respondents**, by comparing two or more rows to each other and to look for patterns. Patterns might be looked for on the ground of propositions formulated in the theoretical framework, but the matrix can also generate new hypotheses.
- **Localize deviant cases which may require explicit detailed analysis**. In opposition to quantitative analysis, in which deviant cases are considered to be inexplicable, qualitative analyses allows for finding an explanation for the deviation from the found pattern in the 'ground material' obtained. If an explanation can be found, this strengthens the pattern found.

By using this technique of content analysis the analysis of the data goes beyond mere description (although that will also be a substantial part of the analysis) and allows for the identification of patterned regularities or categorical aggregation and comparison between respondents and themes. In interpreting the findings much attention will be paid to reflection upon the context.

4.6 Limitations in data collection and data analyses

This section discusses both the difficulties encountered during the data collection in the field, and the limitations in terms of the generalization of findings.

4.6.1. Limitations in the data collection process

The initial aim of the data collection was to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews, which had a largely open design. Main topics to be discussed were taken note of, but the sensitivity of the topic made it difficult to force a certain order of discussing topics on respondents (see also 4.3). The course of the conversation was largely left to respondents, which caused that some topics were not discussed in some interviews, or not extensively. It proved that some respondents did not want to talk about certain topics because it was too confronting for them, or that respondents had so much detailed information to give on one topic that there was not enough time left for others. Furthermore, there were several cases in which the interviews had to be terminated because the respondent feared the conversation was being overheard (especially in public places, in which many of the interviews took place). In one case, the Syrian secret service disturbed a conversation by closing in on us; we had to move and continue the conversation elsewhere. Several interviews that were agreed upon at first (through contactpersons) were cancelled before the actual interview could take place, either because respondents changed their mind themselves, or because they were told not to cooperate by their heads of department or university, whom they had told about the research or who had found out themselves through other sources. The latter happened twice in two different cities, and prevented some eight interviews from taking place (four at each university). Another limitation was also based on fear: out of the 12 academics interviewed, only four allowed the conversation to be recorded. In two of these recorded interviews communication went through a translator, which complicated the easiness and speed of conversation, and which inevitably led to the loss of some information. In total there were 6 cases in which the respondent did not master English well or well enough and in which a third person was present to translate or help translating. This did not always go smoothly, although surely a lot of valuable information was gathered. One interview was held in German, for the academic in question spoke far better German than English.

When it became evident that finding more respondents for interviews (besides the 12 already interviewed) would face many difficulties and in addition this was confirmed by the people that were spoken to, it was decided to develop a questionnaire. The questionnaire had many

advantages over interviews: the academics did not have to show up in person, which gave participation much more anonymity and decreased the fear of facing risks as a consequence of that. Moreover, the questionnaires could be distributed through contactpersons which further eliminated any risks, for the name of the respondent in question would remain unknown to the researcher. Another advantage of the questionnaire is that it was translated in an Arabic version too, which proved to be very important to many academics. It made many academics feel more comfortable to express themselves in their own language and allowed for non-English speaking academics to voice their views and ideas better, as opposed to having to work with a translator. A final advantage was that the questionnaire was very inclusive: it contained all the topics that were important to discuss in very clearly formulated questions, and had incorporated all the insights gained from previous interviews and other conversations. A clear disadvantage came to the fore when the completed questionnaires were received: with no interviewer in front of them to encourage them to elaborate on their arguments, some academics gave very short and simple answers, which undermined the extensiveness and comprehensiveness of the data gained from some questionnaires. This is compensated for by the sufficient amount of respondents and proved to be less of an obstacle because the answers given (in the interviews as well as the questionnaires) were very uniform.

4.6.2 Limitations with respect to data analysis

A first limitation might be that the research location is not the location where the phenomenon studied actually takes place, which means the analysis can only be based on the recollection of events by respondents rather than making use of direct observation, but this may also be a great advantage for it is believed that the academics speak more freely and more at ease outside Iraq, had they been interviewed inside Iraq. By the sufficient number of respondents, the studying of various sources of documentation and the combination of different data-collection techniques (interviews and questionnaires), the danger of a distorted image of reality is reduced as much as possible.

A second limitation is inherent to the nature of case study research: the quality of the research is highly dependent on the capacities of the researcher to extract information adequately: to be a good listener, to elaborate on important pieces of information, to go beyond the surface of what people are saying and to interpretate it unbiased (Yin 1990:21). As demonstrated by the ethical considerations in section 4.3, this was given high consideration. Another disadvantage of this type

of research may be that it is hard to generalize findings, because the research is conducted among a relatively small and specific group of respondents. Yin (1990) comments the following on this:

‘The short answer is that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a “sample”, and the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization) (Yin 1990: 21).’

The aim of this research is therefore not to claim statistical evidence of the causes and features of political violence. The aim is to make a contribution to making the concept and its relations to education and conflict (as well as the broader relations between the two) more insightful, by laying out the Iraqi case on the basis of *perceptions* of the people who are at the heart of and central to the phenomenon. Its exploratory nature makes that this study can shed some light on the relations between the concepts in the specific case of Iraq, and might produce some outcomes that can be harnessed to further theoretical understandings in this field or some points of interest or recommendations for further research.

A final limitation of this study is that case studies are often perceived as encountering difficulties in ensuring validity and reliability: does the measurement reflect what is sought to be measured and will the same findings and conclusion emerge if the followed procedure is repeated? Yin (1990) discusses some ways to compensate for these ‘weaknesses’. To guarantee the validity of the study it is necessary to explicate on the basis of which operational measures the concepts are measured (Yin 1990:33-37), which is done in section 4.4. It should also be kept in mind that generalizability might be limited and findings cannot be generalized to entire populations, but is confined to the bounded system researched (Yin 1990:33-37). This will be taken into account when extracting conclusions. Furthermore the validity is guaranteed by making use of the ‘ground material’ in the data matrix as much and extensively as possible, leading to a portrayal of reality as complete as possible (Yin 1990:33-37). In addition, the numerous direct quotes taken from the data matrix and literally displayed throughout the results chapters contribute to the reliability of the study for it displays the answers of respondents literally, which increases the accessibility and traceability of the data and the conclusions extracted from it and enables the analyzing process to be repeated (Bijlsma-Frankema and Fortuin 1997:458).

5. Voices on the Impact of the Conflict on Higher Education

This chapter first discusses the reasons for academics to leave the country in section 5.1. Second, the role of higher education before 2003 is discussed in section 5.2, followed by the main changes and problems in higher education since the occupation in section 5.3 and the main challenges academics face since the occupation in section 5.4. Section 5.5 then puts the findings of previous sections together in discussing the role of higher education from 2003 onwards and provides an answer to the first research subquestion: *‘What is the impact of the political violence and conflict on higher education in Iraq?’* It also extracts some preliminary conclusions on the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence.

5.1 Reasons to leave Iraq

One of the main indicators to determine the impact of the conflict on higher education in Iraq is the reason why academics have left the country. The 24 respondents left spread out over different years. Two academics had left the country a long time ago, in 1988 and 1999 respectively, to work abroad. The majority however (7) left in the year of the invasion (2003). Another 3 left in 2005, 4 in 2006 and 4 in 2007. From three respondents it is unknown when exactly they fled the country, but they did so after the invasion. One respondent continues to live in Iraq until this day (see Table 2).

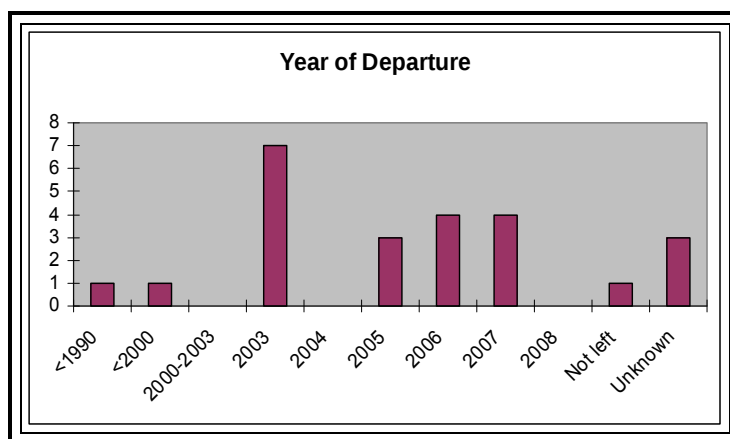


TABLE 2. Year of departure

Two respondents did not answer the question why they had left Iraq, and one still lives in Baghdad. Although the remaining 21 respondents cite multiple reasons for fleeing the country, these reasons share one main common characteristic: lack of security as a direct result of the

occupation, either in terms of the specific targeting of academics or the poor security situation in general. Without exception respondents cite at least one of these two reasons. All answers together can be clustered into four main categories: the threatening and targeting of academics (cited 16 times), the poor security situation in general (cited 7 times), job loss as part of the de-Ba'athification process or other reasons of dismissal by the US administration (cited 5 times) and the complete deterioration of education (cited twice). In Table 3, which is displayed below, these numbers are converted to percentages.

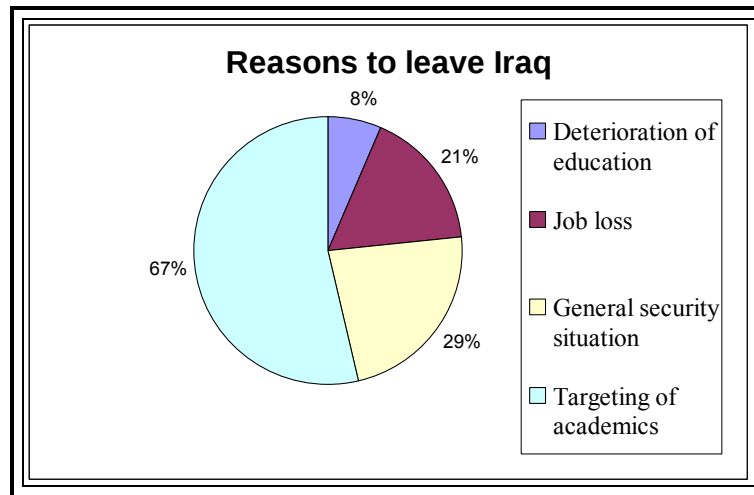


TABLE 3. Reasons to leave Iraq

Most respondents state they fled because of the specific targeting of academics. Important distinctions can be made within this category. Nine out of 16 respondents in this category disclosed what specific experience with the targeting of academics they had that made them leave. Six academics were personally threatened to leave or be killed, two of which faced additional threats when their children received threats in an attempt to put pressure on the academics indirectly. Another 3 academics quote targeted violence towards a family member. One female academic's son was kidnapped for three days and badly tortured. She had received several threats prior to his abduction. Luckily he survived, but she and her family saw themselves forced to leave directly after his release. Another female academic's husband, who was a distinguished academic himself, was assassinated and her two sons received threats after that as well. With what was left of her family, she left too. A third academic's sister, herself an academic too, was kidnapped and killed. He received threats to be killed when he was not able to pay her ransom. After her death he and his family fled. Two more academics told the stories of several of their direct colleagues (and close friends) that had been killed. These experiences illustrate the

targeting of these academics is specific and inclusive, for many personal threats are sadly accompanied by the threatening or harming of academics' direct surrounding circle.

The persons targeted were both men and women and varied in age between 40 and >60, as did the entire group of respondents, and came from the three different disciplines present among all the respondents: the science, social and humanities disciplines. A final remark with respect to the reasons of departure is that two academics who identified the general security situation as a reason to leave also gave concrete specifications: one man was robbed in the streets while being with his 11-years old son and said to have been lucky to survive, and one woman was interrogated violently by American soldiers when they barked into her house in the middle of the night. She also emphasized the deteriorating situation for women as a particular reason to leave: facing major restrictions to move and act, for instance to drive a car or go outside unveiled. The examples from these two respondents highlight the general chaos and climate of repressiveness Iraq finds itself in today.

The fact that the specific targeting of academics constitutes the major reason to leave Iraq is a first indicator of the wide scale and severity of political violence against academics, as does the finding that academics are both directly targeted and indirectly through family members. With respect to the nature of political violence this section brings four forms to the fore: assassination, threatening, abduction and torture. Furthermore, the stories of academics seem to indicate that fear to be harmed, whether due to specific targeting or as a result of the poor security situation in general, is the most important cause to flee. Some forms of violence mentioned seem to be specifically harnessed to create fear, like the threats to academics to either leave or to be killed or the threats to or harming of their children, and it is this fear of further harm that led academics to leave.

5.2 The role of higher education before 2003

With respect to the role higher education had in Iraqi society before 2003, the academics stress it was very positive and highly influential. They use words as '*greatly influential*', '*greatly positive*', and '*very effective*' to depict its importance. Many respondents stress in particular that higher education made a large contribution to developing and enhancing Iraq as a society, demonstrated by quotes as '*it had a very good effect on social and economic development*' (respondent 21) and '*it used to form an important section in creating intellectual capacities that served most of the country's sectors, and contributed in developing and advancing the level of its performance*' (respondent 19). Several examples were given with respect to partnerships between

universities and the private sector and higher education's connection to societal movements or its focus to address societal processes and problems. Moreover, all academics state that the higher education system was one of high quality. They talk about the numerous different disciplines which were taught and the focus on conducting elaborate scientific research according to international standards. Many academics also draw attention to the many Master and PhD graduates the system produced each year and the high number of universities, colleges, and scientific institutions present. An often cited characteristic of the previous higher education system was that it foremost contained a qualified and specialized academic staff and likewise produced qualified and specialized graduates in all fields due to its advanced levels of education and research. As one academic said; *'Iraqi academics were quite well-known all over the world'* (respondent 22). Although three academics also mention that the system was partially damaged or hampered by the embargo on Iraq in the 90's, they still underline the positive aspects and effects of higher education and this is clearly what the emphasis is on. One female academic notes that women were very well represented in the academic field, both in academic staff as well as in the number of students (respondent 7).

The essence of the role the academics attribute to higher education is very well captured in the words of one of the respondents: *'Higher education used to be one of the pillars that modern Iraqi society was based on, ever since the founding of the modern Iraqi country in 1921'* (respondent 16). To resume, it can be concluded that, according to academics, higher education in Iraq prior to the occupation was a very well-functioning system with high academic standards and a large role in enhancing the Iraqi society.

5.3 The main changes in higher education since 2003

When asked to identify the main changes and problems in higher education since the occupation in 2003, many different impediments with respect to its functioning come to the fore. Each respondent quotes several ways in which higher education is now hampered, and many of them speak from experience, backing their views up with examples. It is important to note that respondents do not differentiate between *changes* and *problems* (the two components of the question) and formulate their answers in terms of problems. This implies that every change with respect to higher education is seen as a problem, for no positive or neutral changes are identified at all. Moreover, the answers show considerable overlap, which reinforces the reliability of the issues identified. Some clear patterns can be distinguished. The most often cited obstacles currently prevalent are the decrease of professionalism within the sector (mentioned 17 times),

the take-over of universities by political parties and militias (mentioned 15 times) and low security due to the specific targeting of academics (mentioned 11 times). These obstacles are followed by the braindrain of highly qualified academics (mentioned 9 times) and the destruction of educational infrastructure (mentioned 6 times). Finally, de-Ba'athification is mentioned by 3 academics, and two academics refer explicitly to the US domination in higher education policies as an obstacle. In the table below the mentioned obstacles are displayed (Table 4).

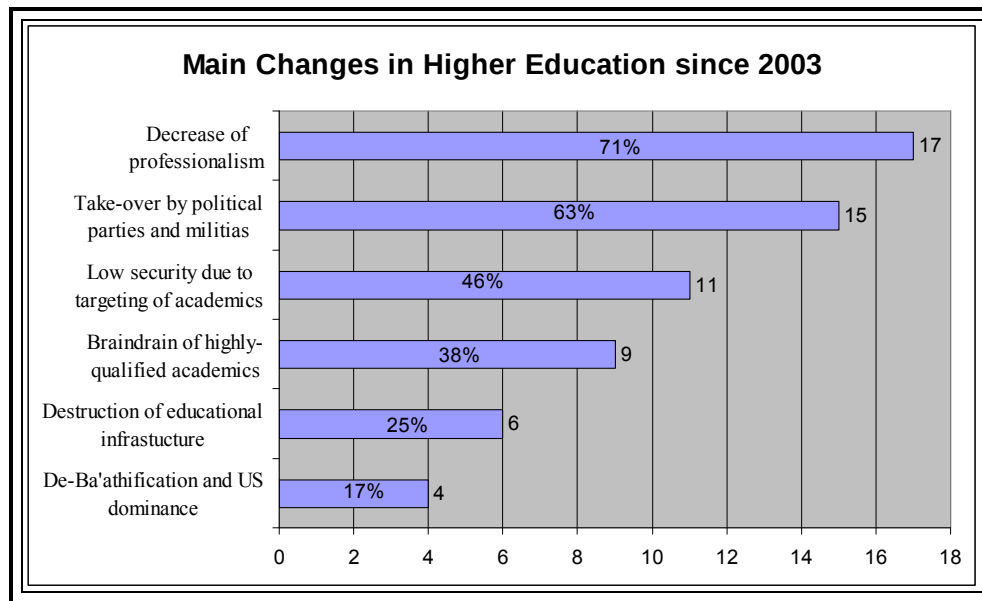


TABLE 4. Main changes in higher education since 2003

The first change that occurred is the material destruction of educational infrastructure while the invasion was taking place and immediately thereafter. This is pointed out by 6 respondents. They mention the destruction of university buildings and facilities such as libraries through bombing or burning, and mention the looting by civilians that took place directly afterwards. Libraries have seemed to be a particular target: what was not destroyed was stolen, as was lab equipment and computers, but also valuable archives and students' personal accounts. It is noteworthy that 4 respondents specifically underline the role of the US in this destruction and looting, also on a wider scale. For instance, two respondents state that the Ministry of Petroleum was spared because it was under the control of and therefore protected by US soldiers. One academic says the sports facilities of Baghdad University were destroyed because it was seen as a symbol of the old regime for Saddam's son controlled it, but the particular faculties that were occupied by US soldiers remained undamaged (respondent 6). The looting in particular is believed to be encouraged by Americans, as is demonstrated by the following statements of 4 different respondents regarding universities:

Respondent 2: *'Americans opened the gates, ran them down with tanks and then civilians looted it.'*

Respondent 3: *'Those who remained, who didn't leave the city, tried to clean the corridors and repair things [...]. We asked the US tanks in front of the university to please help us, to protect the people who were cleaning, but they said 'we are not responsible for this, it is not our job'.' And: 'The looters, robbers and thieves they are, were ordered to do so.'*

Respondent 6: *'The two main sectors the occupation wants to destroy to destroy Iraq as a state are Higher Education and the Health sector. Up until now this destruction still continues.'*

Respondent 7 about the likelihood of academics' cooperation with Americans: *'If we cooperate with you, we will be collaborators. You occupied us, let the places get looted.'*

These statements show how it is perceived that the US played a role in the destruction of educational infrastructure, either actively as part of a deliberate attempt or passively by refraining from putting a halt to it. It suggests that destruction of educational infrastructure is a deliberate strategy and can be regarded as a form of political violence, as was also argued by O'Malley (2007).

Linked to this change of destruction is the de-Ba'athification process, which also took place in the early days of the occupation. It is mentioned by only 3 academics. It is described how many academics were first dismissed from their offices, and later out of their functions too. One academic notes that: *'Most of the posts were filled by Ba'athists. Some of them they joined the party willingly and some just because they want to keep their post and jobs.'* This means that with the de-Ba'athification *'all key-posts were thrown out'* (respondent 5). Obviously this academic considers this to be unnecessary and unreasonable. De-Ba'athification was US-originated and US-led and the criticism on it can therefore be observed as criticism on US policies. In addition two academics mention US domination in reshaping university policies and affairs explicitly. One of them describes how the US decided to run 'free' elections in universities to assign posts democratically, but he witnessed a process which was directed to exclude academics that had been previously in charge and in particular Ba'athists (respondent 3). This confirms that like Lawler (2003) stated academics were thrown out for political reasons, whether they were practicing Ba'athists or not. The intentionality and political motivation of getting rid of Ba'athist people suggests de-Ba'athification is a form of political violence employed by the US, but it is not mentioned often. Although it does not involve direct physical force (as political violence is defined by Steinhoff and Zwerman 2000), it is definitely a deprivation of the right to freely exercise a function and a restriction of freedom of speech, and with that a violation of the right to sustain oneself. Salmi (1990,2000) identifies this as indirect or repressive violence, which is exactly what de-Ba'athification is.

The main challenges seem to come from the take-over of universities by political parties and militias (mentioned 15 times) and the poor security situation academics face for the reason that they are specifically targeted (mentioned 11 times). These two factors are strongly interlinked, for most academics perceive the environment in which academics are threatened to be created by the militias that took control over universities. Six academics specify these threats come from the militias present and 4 perceived the threat coming from students. It is argued that violence is also employed by students because they may actually be part of the militias or take advantage of the insecure situation militias created. This is an important finding. The following statements of four different respondents are very insightful in illustrating this matter:

Respondent 1: *'The universities started to get segregated and are now colored by militias. [...] They planted fear in people. You would be mad to criticize the system or some group now because you don't know who of the students will do the job and will kill you, or will have you killed.'*

Respondent 7: *'They allow students to kill academics: the students will get a place in heaven, because these academics (the ones who do not support militias' religious practices at universities) are the enemy.'*

Respondent 8: *'Students became divided into groups, some of them belonging to militias. This complicates the way of giving education and of education in general. During the exam periods, professors were threatened by students. Even beaten. There is no security. With no security, anything can happen.'*

Respondent 10: *'Inside the colleges, students want to instruct us, teach us a new culture. About religion. But I have my own beliefs! They want us to practice the sectarian way. They want to impose shi'atism on everyone. If you don't accept you get mugged, killed.'*

Academics perceive the influence of militias to be strongly pervasive and repressive, and characterized by demanding compliance, as is also illustrated by the examples given above. Anyone who opposes their practices provokes targeting and runs the risk of being threatened, harassed or killed. It points out that the violence is used as an instrument of power to exert control as was theorized by Steinhoff and Zwerman (2008) and Thompson (2006). Moreover, the statements show that this is done through the creation and manipulation of fear. They show academics are afraid to speak out or speak openly at all. This is in line with how Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue groups exert control in conflicts.

It is important to highlight the many different ways in which academics describe the groups that have taken over the universities. Amongst others they use *'sectarian parties'*, *'militias and ideological parties'*, *'political groups'* (several times), *'racist ignorant religious groups'*, *'extreme gangs and political parties'*, *'militias or religious parties'* and *'political parties or groups'*. It is relevant how often the words 'party' and 'politics' are used, for it reinforces the idea that these groups are organized politically and either employ militias to support their cause, or in fact *are* militias. As one academic (respondent 12) puts it: *'Militias [...] belong to political parties and are politically structured/arranged. They use religion as a cover for their goals. The real or true goals are political. These people are primitive...'* This indicates not only that militias

have a political foundation or goal, but also implies that the violence they employ has a political nature. This finding reflects the theory that violence is a political means to gain and maintain power, as was argued by Steinhoff and Zwerman (2008) and underlines the violence against academics in Iraq is indeed political violence, and appears to be harnessed in a political struggle for control. Similarly relevant is the negative tone in which the militias are spoken about, by which the academics express their disgust and disapproval of their existence and mode of operation. The extent to which militias exert control over universities is discussed in chapter 7, but it is worthwhile to emphasize here that it is so frequently mentioned as the major problem higher education faces nowadays, and that its impact is perceived to reach out to all levels and in a deeply interfering and impeding manner.

The most often cited change (17 times) to or problem for higher education is its deteriorated level of professionalism, or as the majority of respondents seems to phrase it, the complete lack of professionalism. Academics bring up many different aspects of this, ranging from unqualified staff (8 times), favoritism and selectivity (7 times), the elimination or cancellation of classes or even entire faculties and disciplines (6 times), and the issuing of fake certificates for teachers and degrees for students, or the issuing of certificates and degrees on the basis of false conditions (10 times). These practices appear to be a direct result of the militias taking control over universities and the subsequent political violence against academics. Academics state that militias have transformed themselves into the sole decision-makers when it comes to university affairs. A female academic comments that the Higher Ministry of Education is now taken over by political parties and their militias altogether: they have representatives in high positions. She gives the example of the currently very low and selective standards for accepting students into post-graduate programs that have been imposed by militias:

Respondent 9: *'They treat students uneven and unfairly: favoritism of loyal students. They are accepted outside of conditions of the commission who normally accepts students. These students are lazy and stupid but nonetheless get the highest grades. They fail the smart ones, those get kicked out. They select people selectively: the less capable people. The medical college of Baghdad University had 10% general acceptance, and 90% special acceptance!! From this or that sect.'*

Another academic, who left only two years ago, explains how with the arrival of militias unqualified people have taken over the higher education system, because militias have forced academics to leave and have replaced them with their own people, who are not in possession of the right qualifications:

Respondent 12: *'The presidents of the universities, the deans and more of these kinds of persons: most of them do not have degrees. They didn't even go to college, didn't study. These people, the religious people, are controlling the entire education system. They are the decision-makers!! A lot of professors are ignorant. They do not have experience. Only very few of them have stayed in Iraq, most of them fled. I have a friend who is teaching medicine in Iraq but he only works one day a week! All education is now religious education. It is only said that these people have finished their studies, but they never went through all the terms.'*

The view that higher education is now run by unqualified or falsely qualified people to the disadvantage of qualified people is shared by many more respondents, as is the perception that students get passed for exams or classes and obtain degrees without serious academic conditions and standards being addressed. Finally, the irregularity in lecturing hours and the closing down of entire faculties and elimination of disciplines are the last indicators of the deteriorated level of professionalism. It keeps students from completing all the requirements needed to obtain a university degree, leading one respondent (respondent 17) to remark that: *'This reflected negatively on students' academic achievement and caused the graduation of those who are close to being illiterate.'* The many different ways in which the take-over of militias has caused a decrease in professionalism underlines militias employ shrewd and purposeful tactics to exert control over higher education, of which many are non-violent, but no less harmful. The biased treatment of academics and students and the imposed obligation to comply with militias' mode of operation and thought violates core principles of equality and freedom of thought, speech and even religion. It constitutes a deprivation of fundamental political rights, which Salmi (1990,2000) labels as repressive violence.

The final change as identified by academics, braindrain of highly-qualified academics, is also directly linked to the lack of professionalism: it further decreases the level of professionalism since many experienced academics have left the country. Furthermore, they seem to have done so because they were specifically targeted in this new and unsafe militia-controlled environment. Here, it is demonstrated that the four main problems that are identified (take-over by militias, low security because of targeting of academics, braindrain and low level of professionalism) are highly interrelated and interdependent. Two respondents formulate the interconnected nature of these different obstacles particularly strong and clear, and are therefore worth quoting here:

Respondent 18: *'The main changes are the control of militias and ideological parties, the assassination and migration of people with academic qualifications which lead to the fall in the academic level. There was a spread in the process of forging certificates and academic degrees. Certain universities had a fall in their staff to the point where people holding a BA degree would be teaching. Promotions became unrestricted. Universities in Baghdad and Basra turned into fields of ideological practices that are not even remotely related to academia.'*

Respondent 16: *'Higher education was turned into a political issue in a way that exceeded what education used to be before the occupation. This was clearly visible when practices that neither academia nor academic traditions tolerated entered universities, while racist ignorant religious groups targeted universities, and corrupted education and academic traditions. This caused learning days to cut short in favor of those practices, for periods that exceeded the legal hours of learning, which are the sound base of higher education. These racist groups took power by armed militias, who in turn, threatened, kidnapped and murdered. This resulted in a wide migration for professors with great expertise, and a decrease in the professional level of the alternative. Therefore, imposture took the place of academia, while bribery and forgery took the place of true academic integrity.'*

To conclude, the take-over of universities by political parties and militias seems to be the major change and problem in higher education since 2003: it fosters an environment of low security in which academics are specifically targeted and by which the braindrain of academics is encouraged. All of this has caused a severe decrease of professionalism, which is most often cited as a major change. De-Ba'athification and destruction of educational infrastructure are mentioned as main problems to a lesser extent. It is hinted at that besides the US militias are one of the main players in the violence, and furthermore that militias have a political character, as does the violence they employ. It came to the fore that political violence is used as a deliberate instrument of power to exert control over academics and universities, also in non-violent ways. Finally, there is the finding that students may actively take part in the targeting of academics and may either belong directly to militias or take advantage of the climate of impunity militias have created at universities. It became evident that the academics in this study condemn militias' practices strongly.

5.4 The main challenges academics face

The answers to the question what the main challenges are that academics face and have been facing since 2003 broadly follow the same lines as the answers to what the main changes in the higher education system are. However, there are also some new challenges formulated and some changes are formulated differently when they are described as a challenge.

Again, the lack of professionalism makes up the largest category: the employment of unqualified personnel is mentioned 9 times, widespread corruption 8 times, and loss of respect for teachers by students 2 times. The braindrain as a result of many qualified academics leaving the country, which was argued to be a direct cause of the lack of professionalism, is mentioned 5 times. Remarkably, a lack of academic freedom, which was not mentioned as such before, emerges as an important challenge. It is mentioned 6 times. Like unqualified personnel, corruption, loss of respect and braindrain, academic freedom can be distinguished as an important element of the

broadier degradation of higher education. These five factors are therefore integrated in this broader category (see Table 5).

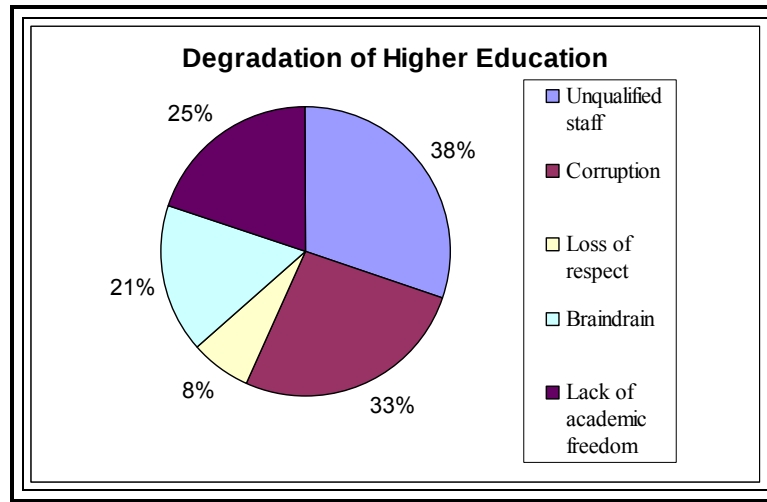


TABLE 5. Specifications of degradation of higher education

De-Ba'athification is mentioned as a main challenge by 4 respondents and another 3 academics state that unemployment in general is a challenge, without specifically referring to de-Ba'athification. Low security due to the specific targeting of academics is also with respect to the main challenges one of the largest categories, with 15 academics referring to it. The identified main change of political parties and militias taking over universities is, when in terms of challenges, phrased as that higher education has turned into sectarian or politicized education. It is identified by 11 different academics. They state that the politics of sectarianism penetrated university life and affairs and turned higher education into a political matter. Moreover, militias are said to explicitly use universities to further their political goals and expand ideological control. Some examples:

Respondent 9: *'Education turned into sectarian system instead of being secular as it used to be.'*

Respondent 11: *'It is a chaos at the universities: because of the lack of teachers, and because of the sectarian policies. The government determined no less than 42 religious holidays in the year! If teachers keep on teaching on one of these days, they get killed.'*

Respondent 16: *'Main challenges are the political-ideological groups, armed militias [...] Higher education was turned into a political issue.'*

Respondent 17: *'Making higher education highly political and breaking it to parts according to political criteria that are currently found in the country.'*

Respondent 19: *'Making universities into areas of political, ethnic and ideological struggle.'*

Respondent 10: *'They want us to practice the sectarian way.'*

These statements again underline the political character of the violence and point out that militias are conducting a political struggle for power and control. It is in this politicized environment that academics have become specifically targeted and it is this environment that has enabled, encouraged and is also reflected in the strong degradation of higher education in general. The statement of respondent 11 in particular demonstrates that besides militias it is perceived the Iraqi government is involved in this too. This also emerges from the explicit perception that there is a hostile political environment towards academics, which will be discussed now.

A final challenge that is identified, one that was not mentioned before, is a hostile political environment. No less than 10 academics mention this explicitly. The actors that constitute a hostile political environment are said to be the US, the Iraqi government and militias. The US hostility towards academics takes shape in the mentioning of interrogations and detention of academics by US military forces. Four academics describe how academics were taken into custody and/or detained, either in relation to their suspected connection to weapons of mass destruction, their membership of the Ba'athist party, or because they were seen as being 'against the occupation' in general. Two different statements:

Respondent 7: *'The US has a list of all scientists in Iraq, and send for them. They talked about cooperation, about that scientists had to be part of a new educational system. A lot of them were scared to say no, so they agreed. If they say yes: no harm. If they say no, they will target them.'*

Respondent 6: *'Academics that were against the occupation were deemed a threat or danger. There is a US alliance with the militias to implement this idea. The detention of academics by US forces was based on information received from the militias.'*

The second statement shows how it is perceived that the US and the militias are cooperating in the targeting of academics. Similarly, this cooperation is perceived to be present in the attack on and abolishment of higher education as a system of freedom, independence and high academic value. It is believed the US is at the core of the modification of higher education in accordance with their ideas and standards –in part because of their lack of willingness to alter the sectarian trends at universities–, as demonstrated by the following examples of statements:

Respondent 11: *'From 2007 onwards they started with masters and PhDs again, but only if those programs were close to the occupation. Another essential part of the occupation was to attack the intellectuality of Iraq. This started with the embargo and has continued ever since, with now the occupation.'*

Respondent 14: *'The main challenges are the interference of the political parties as well as the external influence of outer countries, such as the United States and Iran, who are occupying Iraq to change the curriculum in ways that serve their projects, ignoring with that the academic value.'*

Respondent 16: *'You can consider the occupation and its forceful methods that it threw inside the Iraqi society as the main reason of all the changes in higher education.'*

Respondent 4 about the sectarianism at universities: *'The Americans keep silent.'*

These statements depict a serious deprivation of academic freedom. This too is a non-violent form of political violence, namely repressive violence which entails the deprivation of fundamental political rights such as the freedom of thought and speech (Salmi 1999,2000), in which academics are severely restricted with the change of curriculum and the sectarianism at universities. The impediment of academic freedom as a form of political violence will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

The perception that the currently seated government is hostile towards academics is underpinned by the perception that the rather recent calls of the government for academics in exile to return to Iraq and the offer that they can resume their positions upon return, is fake. Statements such as *'it's not real [...], they're not coming because it is too dangerous and they're not really welcome'* (respondent 6), *'this is only for propaganda reasons'* (respondent 2) and *'it is a media stunt'* (respondent 12) emphasize this. One academic believes that the government does not want academics with higher education degrees to stay nor come back. In his opinion, this is for the reason that it would pose a threat to the ones who have currently taken over the positions of those who have left, as the academics that fled are far better educated. He states that *'with these ideas and this mentality they will not rebuild the educational system'* (respondent 2). Another academic states that furthermore it is still insisted upon that (former) Ba'athists should not come back into influential positions or should not come back at all, while most of the well-skilled people are Ba'athists, *'in name or by opinion'* (respondent 5). He believes this conviction is held and acted upon by the Americans and the government together. In a joined interview, two Ba'athist academics repeatedly stress that the Iraqi government uses the slogan: *'who is not with us is against us'* (respondent 11). In addition, these two as well as a third academic told that they had actually tried to answer the call and had sent in their applications, but two of them received no answer whatsoever and the other one was not accepted anywhere. It underlines de-Ba'athification is a form of and Ba'athicism can be a determinant of political violence against academics, but it is mentioned by very few academics. Clearly, the hostile political environment shaped by the US, militias and the Iraqi government serves to facilitate, if not actively promote, the many challenges academics face. The US is perceived to cooperate with militias in the targeting of academics and in politicizing the content of education, and both the US and the Iraqi government are perceived to contribute to keeping academics out of their posts. In these ways all three parties –the US, militias and the government- contribute to the politicization of higher education, both in terms of educational content as in the way the higher education system is organized and run.

Put together in a comprehensive table, the division of perceived main challenges to academics according to how often they were mentioned and converted to percentages, can be depicted as follows:

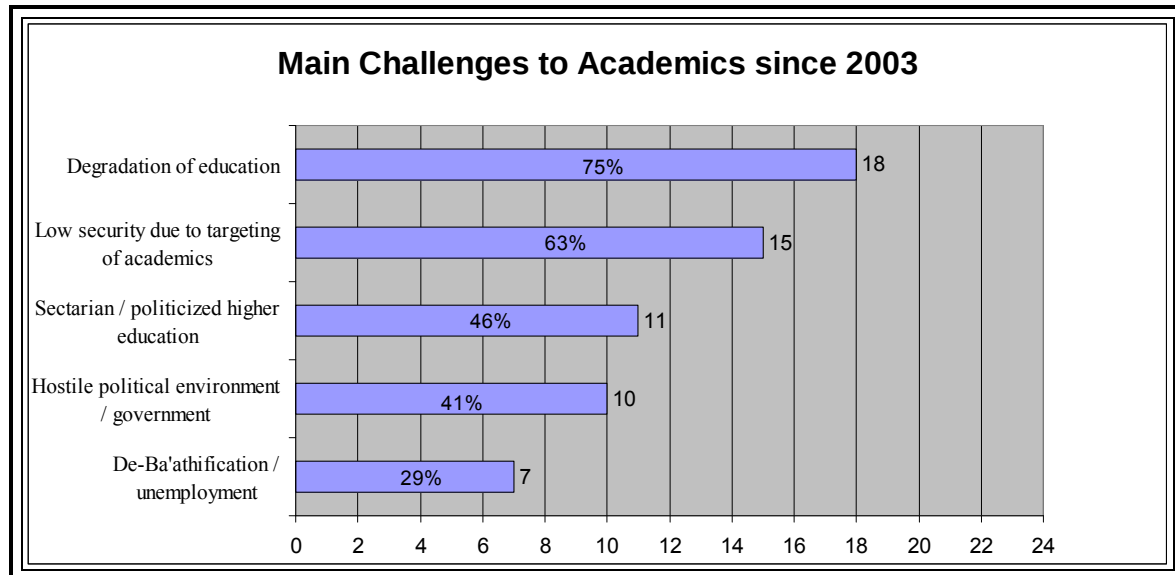


TABLE 6. Main challenges to academics since 2003

To resume, degradation of higher education is most often cited as a main challenge. Within this category the main elements are unqualified staff (mentioned by 29% of respondents), corruption (27%) and lack of academic freedom (20%). The second main challenge as identified by respondents is low security due to the specific targeting of academics, followed by sectarian or politicized higher education (both in terms of content and in the way the system is organized and run) and a hostile political environment or government. The final challenge that comes to the fore is de-Ba'athification or unemployment in general. Again, de-Ba'athification is proved to be a less significant form of political violence because it is not mentioned often, but it was also hinted at that Ba'athicism could be a determinant of political violence.

Although sectarian or politicized higher education and a hostile political environment or government are relatively speaking mentioned less frequently (however still by almost half of the respondents), it was argued that the former is at the bottom of all other main challenges, and the latter facilitates it all, which makes politicization of higher education primarily by militias but also by the US and the government the main challenge. The perception that the US and militias work together in what seems to be a deliberate destruction of higher education was disclosed. The Iraqi government is believed to contribute to this. Academics repeatedly voice the political nature and motivation of the posed challenges to them by these actors, which demonstrates these actors

are fighting a political struggle for power and control within higher education. Finally, it has been demonstrated that many ways to exert control over higher education are non-violent, but no less harmful and definitely elements of political violence, for they are a deprivation of fundamental political rights, or repressive violence.

5.5 The role of higher education after 2003: conclusions

The previous section clearly exposed academics' perception that higher education has deteriorated badly with the occupation and has continued to deteriorate ever since. Evidently, their perception of the role higher education plays in Iraqi society nowadays is similarly negative. Academics use statements such as *'education is a toy, there is no such thing as scientific work now'* (respondent 12), *'you cannot say we have universities now'* (respondent 4), *'there is no higher education (master and PhD programs) in Iraq now because all fled the country'* (respondent 11), and *'it is merely materialistic'* (respondent 13). Educational infrastructure was destroyed and many academics, Ba'athists in particular, were dismissed from their posts. More importantly, militias have taken over many universities and academics have come to be specifically targeted. In combination with a hostile political environment towards higher education composed by the US, militias and the Iraqi government, the take-over of universities by militias has resulted in a complete degradation of higher education. Academics have been killed, fled the country or are no longer able to exercise their function or exercise it properly because of the many restrictions posed on them by militias and the threatening environment the militias have created. One respondent feels there now is no clear plan for higher education altogether, nor are real goals set in his opinion (respondent 15). Another respondent considers the parties that exist today and that did not before to *'not pay any attention to education and knowledge'* (respondent 14). Moreover, from the many examples given by the academics, the perspective arises that higher education has become highly politicized in many respects, which is also explicitly stated by several academics when they describe its current role, among which are the following statements:

Respondent 17: *'There is no role or effect of the higher education, as it is controlled by political groups of thought that made it a field for their struggle.'*

Respondent 19: *'[It] made universities an area of political, ideological and ethnic struggle, and it caused curriculums towards ideological directions that served the occupation and the government that came along with it.'*

Respondents declare that militias have politicized educational content and the way in which the higher education system is organized, managed and run, with principles of equality, objectivity and the freedom to teach, think and speak being overruled by favoritism, corrupt practices and repressiveness. The militias are perceived to be supported by the US and the Iraqi government, but these parties are said to take part in the politicization of higher education actively themselves as well.

While some academics thought to observe some improvements in 2007, when the government started to ask academics in exile to return to their country to resume their positions and when some efforts were made to restart Master and PhD programs, they soon realized these changes were merely show. Several academics underline the call of the government for academics to return is a farce, a lie intended to demonstrate their good intentions and efforts to the outside world. An important finding that emerges from the data is that the vast majority of the respondents links the current state of higher education to the occupation undeniably. Whether it is done explicitly by condemning the occupational forces for playing an active role in the deterioration of higher education by pinpointing them as the main and purposeful perpetrators or more implicitly by putting emphasis on the chaos the occupation brought along and how it maintains the status-quo, they all specifically differentiate between a 'before' and 'after' situation. It becomes evident that the ruling perception encompasses that the prevalent problems are a direct result of the occupation, whether intended or not. The extent to and ways in which the academics attribute the problems to the occupation are discussed in chapter 6. For now it is sufficient to conclude that the US is perceived to be one of the major players in the violence against higher education.

In answer to the first research subquestion '*What is the perceived impact of the conflict and political violence on higher education in Iraq?*', it can be concluded that the conflict and subsequent violence have directly caused many severe and previously non-present challenges to higher education. To summarize, this chapter showed that the role of higher education in Iraq is extremely marginalized since the occupation by the US due to the politicization of the system, which entails the take-over of universities by political parties and militias exercising sectarian practices and a political environment supportive of these practices but hostile towards academics and higher education. This has fostered an environment in which the large-scale and specific targeting of academics takes place, and which has resulted in and is reflected in a complete degradation of higher education.

This chapter also provided some specific insights into the dynamics of political violence against higher education. It is perceived that all the major problems in higher education are part of a

deliberate attempt by the US, militias and the government to hamper higher education. It was shown that militias in particular employ political violence as an instrument of power, with their take-over of and complete level of control over universities which facilitated and encouraged all other major problems. They are said to have turned universities into politicized areas, giving space to their struggle for political power and control. However, the many links that are perceived to exist between the US, militias and the government and the perception that together they give shape to a hostile political environment, shows that the conflict is also determined by the US and the Iraqi government conducting a struggle for power and control. It seems political violence, both its direct forms such as threatening and physical harm as its repressive, non-violent forms such as imposing sectarianism on universities, politicizing educational content and de-Ba'athification, is employed as a political means to gain and maintain power at universities and as a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. It is used among academics to create and manipulate fear of opposing the practices that are obviously detrimental to higher education and is used to exert control over higher education in that way. More generally, this chapter pinpointed the wide scale and seriousness of political violence against academics and the higher education sector at large and discloses some of the forms of political violence are assassination, threatening, abduction, torture, intimidation, destruction of educational infrastructure, and politicization of higher education, including de-Ba'athification. The next chapter will dig deeper into the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence.

6 Voices on the Political Violence against Higher Education

This chapter explores the perception of academics on the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against them. The scale of political violence is discussed in section 6.1, followed by a discussion of the nature of political violence in section 6.2. The perceived dynamics of political violence consists of three elements: first, the reasons and purposes behind the violence in section 6.3, second the factors that play a role in the violence in section 6.4 and third, the initiators and perpetrators behind the violence in section 6.5. Section 6.6 brings the findings together and presents the conclusions on the second research subquestion: *‘What are the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of the political violence against academics in Iraq?’*

6.1 The scale of political violence

To determine the perceived scale of political violence academics were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement that academics are targeted *specifically* and *systematically*. Out of 24 respondents, 23 respondents answer this question with a clear-cut ‘yes’. Four of them nuance their answers by stating academics are indeed specifically and systematically targeted, but not because they are academics, but because they are part of the intellectual class of Iraq. These academics believe the larger intellectual class as a whole constitutes the target of the attacks. Another academic that agrees with the statement adds that so many others are targeted too (respondent 7). Only one respondent does not agree with the statement. He states that compared to the entire population being killed, the number of academics assassinated is just a very small percentage (respondent 8). However, he also adds that there is definitely a plan to eliminate high-profile people, but they do so by designing the killing processes to cover a wide spectrum of people to cover up the real reasons behind the killings. This means that he does agree with the statement after all. These numbers are presented in the tabel below (Table 7).

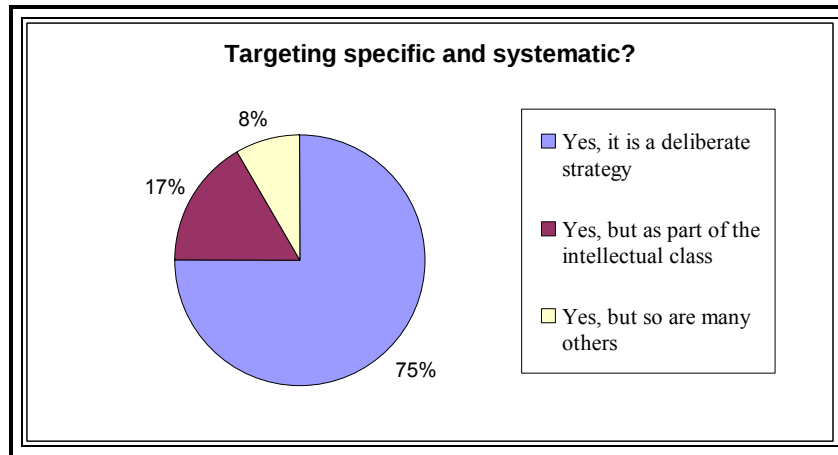


TABLE 7. Perceptions of the scale of political violence against academics

A very significant finding is that no less than 17 respondents refer to the targeting as a deliberate strategy or an intentional or secret plan, which underscores that the violence is a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. This will be discussed more elaborately later on. Another indicator used to determine the scale of political violence was the question whether some academics were more targeted than others. Unfortunately, there is some missing data with respect to this question because 5 respondents did not answer this question or said to not know. From the ones that did, 5 state that this is not the case since the education sector as a whole is targeted and the academics targeted represent a wide and divers spectrum. Four academics declare that mainly high profile academics are targeted and one says especially full professors. This might imply that prominent academics are more targeted than others. Furthermore, a category of specifically targeted people that comes to the fore is Sunnis: 3 respondents cite this explicitly, 2 cite that this might be the case, and from another 3 it can be deducted from the fact they emphasize that the threat comes from Shi'a attempting to eliminate their enemies. Finally, 2 respondents mention that Ba'athists are more targeted than others which means they identify it as a determinant of the violence, but with only 2 respondents stating this it does not provide very strong evidence. It is evident respondents' perspectives on who might be mostly targeted are much differentiated. What does come to the fore is that the scale of political violence is a very wide one, with a variety of academics being targeted. In section 5.1 it was also argued the scale is a very wide one because academics are targeted directly or indirectly through family members. Moreover, with 75% of respondents underscoring the targeting of academics is undoubtedly specific and systematic and 25% subscribing this is the case but as part of a larger targetgroup, it can be concluded the scale of political violence against academics is inclusive and all-embracing. It is academics' unmistakable perception that the scale represents academics throughout the sector and depicts a

plan to denigrate the sector's importance and destroy the academic body of thought and influence, i.e. the violence is politically motivated. Subsequent sections will shed some more light on this matter.

6.2 The nature of political violence

The previous chapter has already disclosed some of the forms of political violence. To fully disclose the nature of political violence, respondents were asked to identify which means or forms of violence are used against academics. Many respondents simply list various forms of violence that are used, but especially in the interviews a lot of stories were told that are exemplary for the nature of the violence. In addition, many insights can be gained from other questions, with respect to which a variety of examples of violence were discussed too. Nine forms of violence can be distinguished, mentioned in answer to this question or elsewhere throughout the interviews or questionnaires. They are displayed in the table below, with the percentages of respondents citing them (Table 8).

Forms of political violence as mentioned by academics				
Killing	Threatening	Kidnapping	Expulsion from posts	Intimidation
100% (24)	63% (15)	54% (13)	38% (9)	33% (8)
Detention / Arrest	Forced migration	Torture	Other physical violence	
25% (6)	17% (4)	17% (4)	Beating: 8% (2) Rape: 4% (1)	

TABLE 8. Perceptions of the nature of political violence against academics

Clearly, academics perceive assassinations to be the dominant form of political violence, as it is mentioned by all respondents. The academics voice that most of the assassinations take place within or in the direct surroundings of universities, although there are also stories of academics

being traced down and killed at other locations. Many specific stories were told of academics that were killed, of which a few fragments are integrated below.

Respondent 10: *'Al-Rawi, the head of Baghdad University, was in his clinic. The secretary was his sister. A group, she thinks they are patients, comes in, so she allows them to enter. They have guns with no sound....they killed him! And his sister was there! [...] Why did they kill him? He is a figure of Iraq.'*

Respondent 4: *'I know of one case in which the student wanted a resit for an exam and the professor said no. He was killed when he left university.'*

Respondent 1: *'There are so many examples of people being killed by their 'own' factions, Shi'a by Shi'a and so on. One night, one of my friends was on tv. He said: Al-Sistani should not involve himself in the conflict, in politics. Within two days he was gunned down. Another friend was also on tv some months later. He is a political analyst, at the Media and Information Department of Baghdad University. Said something similar about Mahdi Army, about that they should not get or be involved in politics. The day after that he was gunned down when he left university.'*

Respondent 11: *'I have three examples of friends that were killed at the gate of university, because these gates are controlled by militias like Sadr's: Abdel Mutaleb Al-Hachemi, Adnan Al Abid, Amer Al Qaisy. They were killed at the gate of Baghdad University, by Badr militias.'*

Threatening is the second most prominent way in which political violence manifests itself: it is mentioned by 63% of respondents. Many respondents add it concerns threats to be killed or to leave the country, and some identify threats to academics' family members as a form of political violence. Moreover, threatening is often cited to occur in combination with other forms of political violence, that is with kidnapping (mentioned by 54%), expulsion from posts (mentioned by 38%) and forced migration (mentioned by 17%). Kidnapping by militias often goes hand in hand with threatening, and the leaving of posts as well as migration are often a result of threats from militias received before. Expulsion from posts was not distinguished as a form of political violence in the literature (forms as distinguished by O'Malley 2007) and represents a new finding. It is a non-violent form of political violence, but nevertheless an important one: academics perceive it as a form of political violence because it has political motives and is a serious deprivation of their rights. Hence, it is a form of repressive political violence, as defined by Salmi (1990,2000). The forced dismissal of academics from their posts by Americans as part of the de-Ba'athification process is also part of expulsion from posts as a form of repressive political violence. Another form of political violence distinguished is intimidation, which was explicitly mentioned by 33% of respondents. While it is difficult to make a clear distinction between threatening and intimidation, it seems intimidation can encompass more. The difference seems to lie in that with respect to threatening, it is clearly explicated what kind of action the threatened person is expected to pursue or what kind of physical harm the person might face (for instance, to leave the country or otherwise be killed), whereas intimidation is any action *from which a threat is perceived*. Also, intimidation is not necessarily directed at an individual but can be harnessed against a group. Basically, it seems intimidation is a less direct and more implicit

form of threatening: threatening is an expression of the intention to inflict harm and intimidation is the more general practice of inducing fear into another. Below two examples of intimidation given by respondents are displayed.

Respondent 9: *'I had a student who didn't come to a test three times. When I asked him why, he told me he was an illegal transporter of oil for some very important person. He told me this to show he has connections so I can't do anything about it. Another example. In Baghdad University, the college of economy and the department of banking and financial sciences, one class failed a hard test. After that, students sent a bullet in an envelop to the professor in question. These students are part of the militias and told him he must pass all students. The professor left the university and went to Amman. After three months he came back to Iraq, and they killed him.'*

Respondent 1: *'An example: Baghdad University had a hall for celebrations, the Baghdad Hall. Now the name has been changed to Al-Hakim Hall. Gives you the impression that this (the university) is now an Al-Hakim base, so be careful. They planted fear in people.'*

Next, detention and arrest as a form of political violence is mentioned by 25%. It is perceived to be employed by both Americans (who detained a lot of academics in the early days of the occupation) and militias (until today). The final two forms of political violence, torture and other forms of physical violence, are mentioned by 17% and 12% respectively. Torture and other forms of physical violence are mainly attributed to be harnessed by militias, but also by students, many of which in fact belong to militias. Except for expulsion from posts, the distinguished forms of political violence fall into Salmi's (1990,2000) category of direct physical violence: they constitute physical acts causing deliberate injury to the integrity of human life. Clearly, the distinguished forms of political violence are harnessed to implant fear in people. This is in line with Bush and Saltarelli (2000) who state that conflicts are perpetuated by the mechanism of creating and manipulating fear among populations. This section shows this is effectively done among academics, as was also shown by the finding that it is mainly fear that has made academics flee the country in section 5.1. The fact that many respondents would not allow the interview to be recorded, put a lot of emphasis on anonymity or were afraid to meet for a face-to-face interview underlines this too. It also shows that political violence is an effective instrument of power to exert control, as was argued by Thompson (2006) and Steinhoff and Zwerman (2008). Furthermore, the distinguished forms are mainly a consequence of the take-over of universities by militias and the hostile political environment towards academics and higher education, which seems to have created a climate in which anything is possible and through which fear is created and manipulated. This can be labeled as a climate of impunity, as was also hinted at in section 5.3. As one female respondent states:

Respondent 10: *'Students asked their professor at the political science college to give them stamped notebooks, to write the answers at home. When he refused, they threatened to kidnap his family. He was afraid, so he moved to Mosul University. The point is, it's not just.... It is the absence of law. Everyone can do anything. That's encouraging the destruction of education.'*

It should be noted that the political violence is not just targeted at academics, but is used against the higher education sector as a whole. This becomes evident in several ways. First, although not mentioned as such by respondents, the destruction of educational infrastructure is also a form of political violence (as identified by O'Malley 2007), especially because it was perceived by 25% of respondents that buildings, laboratories and so on were specifically aimed at and were part of a deliberate attempt to hamper and destroy higher education (see section 5.3). Second, other educational staff (non-academics) has also been targeted, as is showed by the following example:

Respondent 10: *'In the first few years from the occupation, there was this woman in the Technical University in Baghdad. She was a register manager. Two students who got fired from the university visited her and said they were fired because of something political. She is very professional, an old woman, not married. She checked it and said: no, it is because of absence, as a penalty. They shot her right in her office.'*

A third indicator of political violence being harnessed against the higher education sector as a whole is the finding that higher education is politicized by the take-over of militias of universities and by the hostile political environment the US, militias and the government employ against academics and higher education (see 5.4 and 5.5), which fostered the purposeful degradation of education. This entails the designing of the system to be in accordance with and in favor of the ideas and purposes of the parties that currently hold power in Iraq, and manifests itself in employment of unqualified staff, corruption (including favoritism and selectivity), loss of academic freedom (including change of curriculum), braindrain and loss of respect (see 5.4). It was argued that the politicization of higher education is a non-violent or repressive form of political violence, but a very significant and no less harmful one. This is a new finding for it not mentioned in the scientific literature on the nature of political violence (O'Malley 2007). It is discussed more elaborately in chapter 7.

On the basis of this section the perceived nature of political violence against academics can be determined. It was already demonstrated in chapter 5 that the destruction of educational infrastructure is a form of political violence, but a less significant one. This is confirmed here, because it was only mentioned as a major problem in higher education and not as form of violence as such. The same goes for de-Ba'athification as a (repressive) form of political violence. It is acknowledged as a form, but relatively speaking a less significant one. The empirical study of O'Malley (2007) on Iraq revealed that targeted assassination, death threat, abduction, forced displacement and arbitrary detention are important forms of political violence

against academics in Iraq. This can be confirmed with some adjustments: targeted assassination and threatening are the most prominent and recurrent forms of violence; kidnapping, expulsion from posts as a repressive form and intimidation are other major forms; and detention, forced migration, and torture and other physical violence are less frequent forms. Another important finding is that political violence is harnessed not only against academics, but against the higher education system as a whole. This entails destruction of educational infrastructure and violence against other educational staff, but more importantly violence against higher education as a system: that is, through the politicization of higher education. This is an important non-violent or repressive form of political violence, and one of the major forms of political violence employed against higher education in Iraq. It also reaffirms that the scale of political violence is inclusive and all-embracing – however, not just with respect to academics, but with respect to higher education as a whole. Moreover, the finding that political violence also manifests itself in non-violent or repressive forms is an important contribution to the theory on political violence. Finally, it has been once more shown in this section that militias in particular use a variety of forms of political violence to create and manipulate fear. The political violence is effectively harnessed as a deliberate and explicit instrument of power to exert control over academics and higher education as a whole.

6.3 The dynamics of political violence: reason and purpose behind the targeting

The dynamics of political violence were disclosed by asking respondents what the reason and purpose behind the targeting are, which factors played a role and who they thought were the main initiators and perpetrators. In this section the reason and purpose behind the political violence will be discussed. The factors that underpin the political violence are discussed in section 6.4 and the actors that play a role in the violence are discussed in section 6.5.

Although respondents do not distinguish between reasons behind the violence on the one hand and the purpose of the violence on the other hand, clear distinctions can be made. Overall, academics perceive the purpose to be to destroy Iraq as a nation, to prevent it from rebuilding and to keep it a weak state by means of destroying higher education. The reason then is that higher education is the infrastructure of the country; it represents the main pillars the country, or any country, is build on.

No less than 16 respondents (67%) refer in some way to higher education being the foundation the country is build on. That this is especially true in the case of Iraq can be deduced from the finding that higher education used to be a system of high quality and had a large role in enhancing

Iraqi society, which came to fore in section 5.2. With respect to reasons of targeting, one academic regards higher education as the system that shapes the Iraqi identity by providing people with a sense of (common) history, culture and religion (respondent 3). He remarks that if this bases is questioned and destroyed as is being done now by attacking higher education and its agents, it means the basic identity of the country will be wiped out. Some other examples of academics citing that academics are attacked because higher education forms the pillars the country is built on are displayed below.

Respondent 9: *'To evacuate the country from any scientific progress and ideas. The country has to be crippled, without people with certain ideologies, to let the country float on uneducated people and ignorance, to keep the country weak. [...] They want to destroy the infrastructure, which is what Higher Education is, of the country. Higher Education is what Iraq is strong in. They want to get rid of educated people or thinkers to replace them with their own people.'*

Respondent 10: *'Sometimes...sometimes I think they don't want people with higher education (degrees) to feel stability. They think all PhDs belong to the previous regime, that all those who have an academic degree are loyal to Saddam. They need to change it all so the new system fits with their own ideas. But after the occupation, Ba'athists look like angles. They want to have a new generation that has loyalty to Israel, to the US. The US doesn't want a good education system, otherwise they would not have allowed those people to have power.'*

Respondent 13: *'Academics are the pillars of the country, and the basis of its development.'*

Respondent 14: *'This targeting is because the base of countries' development is academia and knowledge, and with its absence and setback in its performance, countries fall back and retreat in their development.'*

Respondent 24: *'When the highest level of education is destroyed then it is easy for the enemy to put his hands on the country.'*

Furthermore, the remaining 8 (33%) state that academics are (part of) the intellectual class, which makes them influential people that can rebuild the country. This can be regarded as an indirect way of saying higher education is the basis of the country. One academic for instance says that the religious people are trying to control people by uneducating them or by keeping them uneducated, because they can be convinced more easily like that (respondent 5). He believes that academics, being the liberal people that they are, are eliminated for the reason that they could change people's minds and would thereby lessen the power of religious fanatics over people. Some more examples of statements are shown below.

Respondent 7: *'If you want to run a country with mullahs and clerics you have to remove the educated people.'*

Respondent 12: *'If you look at the people who are killed, it's only the best people, the famous/well-known people. [...] It is because they are the foundation of society, the baseline of the state, the grundlage. If you disturb this, no state can restore or rebuild itself.'*

Respondent 23: *'Academics are being targeted to weaken the ability of Iraq and Iraqis to compete with other advanced countries and to remain. Some academics are targeted more than others because they are the elite which the society depend on and the enemies aim to paralyze development activities.'*

Respondent 1: *'Goals of the militias was to wipe out the Iraqi intellectual society.'*

Respondent 12: *'They eliminate the intellectual class.'*

The respondents are remarkably unified in the answers they give. All of them stress the vital role academics play and higher education in general plays in shaping and strengthening a country, especially in Iraq which had such a strong and well-developed higher education system. It can be concluded that this is the primary reason why academics are targeted as such; they give shape to a higher education system that is crucial to the advancement of society. They create and spread knowledge, enhance a society's capabilities with the practical implementation of their research and findings, educate people into independent and intellectual thinkers and take a critical stance to their surroundings inherent to scientific thinking; all of which is perceived as a threat to those who want to control and educate a society to further their goals and theirs only. This underlines that the targeting of academics is perceived to be specific and systematic, and is part of the specific and systematic targeting of higher education as a whole.

The question rises what it is exactly that underpins the will to destroy Iraq as a country. Academics gave many useful insights in this. Like the perception on the reasons behind the targeting, the perspective academics display on the actual purpose of this is almost equally uniform. Out of 24 respondents, 18 state the ultimate purpose of targeting academics is to destroy Iraq and to prevent it from rebuilding. That is; 75% of respondents explicitly frames it this way, and particularly uses the words 'to destroy Iraq'. Moreover, many respondents specify why the destruction of Iraq is aimed at. The first main reason is perceived to be the strategic and powerful player Iraq used to be in the region. It is perceived by 14 respondents that hostile states attempt and succeed to keep Iraq weak so it will never pose a threat to them again. Six respondents believe this weakening of the country to come from Iran and 7 point out Israel, which is demonstrated by statements as:

Respondent 2: *'Iran doesn't want Iraq to be powerful again. Now Iran controls the Gulf and they want to keep it this way.'*

Respondent 19: *'It is in the best interest for Israel and Iran to weaken the academic sector to keep it from continuing to rise with Iraqi capabilities in different sectors and specialties that could form advanced scientific expertise, which would threaten the national security of these countries in the future as it did before the occupation.'*

Respondent 4: *'Israel wants to destroy Iraq as a strategic force in the region.'*

This outlines that the conflict is not only defined by militias conducting a political struggle for power and control, but moreover and more importantly by the states of Iran and Israel in their struggle for power and control. The US is believed to be at the core of this struggle for the reason that they have started it with their occupation, as will be discussed in section 6.5. Another reason for the destruction of Iraq identified has an economic ground - to obtain Iraq's main resource: oil. Six respondents quote that the US is after Iraq's oil, one of which believes that Iran is too. This outlines that the conflict has not only a political character, but also partially an economic character, which was discussed in the theoretical framework with the theories of Davies (2004, 2005) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004) that hold that many conflicts are economically driven. A final purpose of the targeting of academics that was distinguished by another 5 academics, is to create chaos in Iraq, which is a specification of how Iraq is sought to be destroyed. These academics underline that as long as Iraq is preoccupied with curtailing its problems of daily occurring violence, it is prevented from diverting attention to rebuilding the state and policies can be imposed more easily. From these statements it comes to the fore that the violence between and within different groups is something that was imposed on Iraqi society along with the occupation. Academics feel sectarianism has a strong rationale behind it – that is, it is deliberately created to serve the political goals of weakening Iraq and keep it from rebuilding.

Respondent 13: *'All the problems in Iraq: it is not planted deeply in society, but it's something imposed. All these groups fighting is something created, forced in the Iraq society: from out, not from in. People have been living together for thousands of years. Now you might be killed just because of being Shi'a, or Sunni. [It is] encouraged by the Americans, the Iranians, maybe other parties in the area, to damage all the sectors of life, especially the cultural sector, the educational sector. Why? To change the country into a weakest country in the area, this is what I believe.'*

Respondent 5: *'They are trying to keep Iraq busy with its problems so it will not develop and be strong and a good country. [...] People are opposed to each other, eliminate each other. It is a consequence of the occupation and it is the consequence of changing the political structure.'*

Respondent 19: *'One of the goals of the American-British occupation is to maintain Iraq as a weak, broken country that is busy with ethnic and political struggles.'*

This illuminates how sectarian divisions are believed to be imposed on Iraqi society by the US, Iran and the militias and is an extremely significant finding. It also hints at the harnessing of religion and ethnicity to mobilize identities for conflict, as the work of Thompson (2006) and Davies (2004,2005) on the perpetuation of conflict revealed happens in contemporary conflicts.

To conclude, the main purpose behind the targeting is perceived to be to destroy Iraq as a nation and prevent it from rebuilding (or more particularly to create chaos that disables Iraq to rebuild itself), either because Iraq was a powerful and strategic player in the region and therefore posed a threat to Iran, Israel and to a lesser extent the US, or because the US and to a lesser extent Iran is after Iraq's oil. This enlightens that the US, Iran and Israel are perceived to be the main initiators of the conflict. It also stresses the targeting of academics is specific, systematic and intentional, and that violence is a political means to gain and maintain power (as argued by Thompson (2006)) as well as of that political violence is a deliberate and explicit instrument of power (as argued by Steinhoff and Zwerman (2008)). It shows the conflict has a fundamentally political character, but partially also an economic character. The conflict seems to be initiated on the basis of greed, either because of greed for political power (the US, Iran and Israel) or because of greed for economic gain (the US). This is in line with Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) theory that humans initiate and involve themselves in conflict because of greed rather than grievances. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that although the conflict is definitely defined by groups struggling for power and control, this does not only occur directly through armed groups like Thompson (2006) stated, but is also done by states, and perhaps even primarily by states. Finally, some evidence was provided for the assumption that sectarian divisions are imposed on Iraqi society: academics state that the divisions along religious and ethnic lines are imposed from the outside. This seems to bear resemblances with Thompson's (2006) theory that religion and ethnicity are harnessed to mobilize people for conflict.

6.4 The dynamics of political violence: determinants of the political violence

With respect to the factors that may contribute to or underpin the political violence, six factors were discussed: political conviction, beliefs or position (a), field of work (b), connection to the past regime (c), being perceived as working with or for the occupational forces (d), religion (e) and ethnicity (f). Unfortunately, a relatively large amount of data is missing here because the factors could not be discussed as such in the interviews or not filled out in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, some clear patterns emerge when analyzing the data that is available and from which some interesting findings can be deduced.

The factor that is perceived to play a role in the political violence by the largest amount of respondents is 'connection to the past regime': 83% of respondents answers with 'yes' on the question if this is a factor of influence. Respondents state that fulfilling an academic function under Saddam can be a reason for targeting, especially when one was member of the Ba'ath

party. Here, the assumption that Ba'athicism is a determinant of political violence is provided strong evidence for and it can be concluded that academics perceive it is.

The second largest category is political convictions, beliefs or position, with 71% of respondents believing this is a factor that plays a role in the violence. Academics stress that being liberal and progressive or simply belonging to the intellectual class may be a reason for targeting.

Religion and ethnicity form the third category. Although a relatively large percentage of respondents identifies this as a possible reason (50% for religion and 58% for ethnicity), some serious nuancing is required. Most respondents that answer confirmative specify that however large, religion and ethnicity play an indirect or secondary role. The common perception is that it is evidently harnessed by extremist groups (both by Shi'a militias and Sunni extremist groups, but mainly by the Shi'a militias) to exert control over people and that is exactly what the emphasis should be on: they harness it this way, for it is not a reason as such. To quote one academic: *'They have turned religion into a political agenda'* (respondent 7), or another one: *'It only matters to this or that sect or religion, they use it as propaganda'* (respondent 12), and yet another: *'Religion doesn't play a role at all; political ideology does'* (respondent 16). Many academics underscore that the present divisions along religious or ethnic lines never existed before. It is mentioned by more than half of the respondents at some point in the interview or questionnaire. The common perception is that the CPA started this practice (respondent 4: *'Bremer started the division of society and started to sectarianize national policy'*) after which it was reproduced and reinforced by many different actors in higher education as well (respondent 3: *'The militias, parties, Americans, Iranians...they all encouraged clashes between different groups'*). All academics seem to be strongly opposed to the segregation of society and many are reluctant to name religion and ethnicity as a factor behind the violence, for it is their belief it is not a real factor but an imposed and alienating one. Before the occupation, Iraqis did not know about each other which religious stream they belonged too. It was not asked either, because it was seen as a matter of no importance whatsoever. As one academic says: *'They were all persons'* (respondent 2) and yet another: *'We were all Iraqi'* (respondent 12). It was already pointed out in the previous section that academics perceive sectarian divisions to be imposed on Iraqi society. Here, it can be confirmed completely. The picture that the violence in Iraq is characterized by religious and ethnic struggle (or sectarianism), as it is so often portrayed by the US as well as the media, turns out to be false: academics from all religions and ethnicities are targeted. Religion and ethnicity do play a role, but only an indirect or secondary role. They are harnessed as determinants to cover up the real reasons of the violence, which are believed to be political. It can also be concluded that it is believed groups use religion and ethnicity as a mechanism to perpetuate and intensify the

conflict and violence: they harness it as such for it is not a determinant in itself. This finding is similar to the ideas of Davies (2004, 2005) that through the politicization of identity the idea of 'otherness' is created, which leads to the polarization of society. Thompson (2006) already noted that it is mainly religion and ethnicity that are harnessed to mobilize people into war. However, she argues that it is armed groups who harness violence in this way, but from the discussion above it can be deduced that states (US, Iran and the Iraqi government) harness religion and ethnicity to mobilize people into war too, or at the very least encourage and contribute to it. It is important to note that the academics in this study emphasize that most Iraqis have not given in to these practices and are still strongly opposed to and refuse to believe in religious and ethnic divisions.

With respect to the remaining two factors field of work and working for the occupational forces no obvious pattern can be distinguished. A lot of data is missing, especially with regard to working with the occupational forces: almost half did not answer this question, one quarter said 'yes' and one quarter said 'no'. The fact that it was only mentioned three times in the interviews of which two times the answer was negative, may be an indication that it hardly plays a role. Furthermore, of the academics that said this factor could play a role (also in the questionnaire) more than half said 'to some extent' or not for academics. Field of work is by 29% of respondents not perceived as a factor in the violence for in their opinion academics from a variety of disciplines is targeted, and not given an answer to by 25%. The 46% that does believe it can play a role gives different explanations, such as academics that were possibly related to the field of weapons of mass destruction (respondent 1), nuclear scientists (respondent 4), or state that academics with high qualifications or a highly respected reputation were targeted. However, the latter is not related to field of work as is meant here, but to being part of the intellectual class, which was already identified as a main reason before.

A very significant finding is that almost half of the respondents explicitly and repeatedly stress that the violence is political, serving political interests and goals, and that all other factors are subordinate to this. This confirms the earlier findings that the conflict as well as the violence have a fundamentally political character: the conflict is defined by actors conducting a political struggle for power and control and the violence is a political means in this conflict to gain and maintain power. From this section it can be concluded that political conviction, beliefs or position and connection to the previous regime (or Ba'athicism) are seen as the main factors possibly provoking targeting, directly followed by religion and ethnicity as indirect factors harnessed as a cover for political goals. Both militias and the states of the US, Iran and the Iraqi government are perceived to employ religion and ethnicity in this way, for it is these actors that have imposed and

continue to facilitate and promote sectarian divisions in Iraqi society. Finally, this section showed field of work and working for the occupation cannot be confirmed as factors that play a role in the violence; they rather appear to do not.

6.5 The dynamics of political violence: initiators and perpetrators behind the violence

The field of actors playing a role in the current conflict in Iraq is very diffuse. This seems to be acknowledged by all respondents, as the vast majority of them stresses the diversity of parties, groups or states involved. That does not mean the academics do not have a clear idea or opinion about who the main actors are. In answer to the question who the initiators and perpetrators of the political violence against academics are, 22 academics mention the US (92%), 20 mention the militias (83%), 20 mention Iran (83%), 16 mention Israel (66%) and 13 mention the Iraqi government (54%) (see Table 9). This is in line with what was brought to the fore in previous chapters and sections.

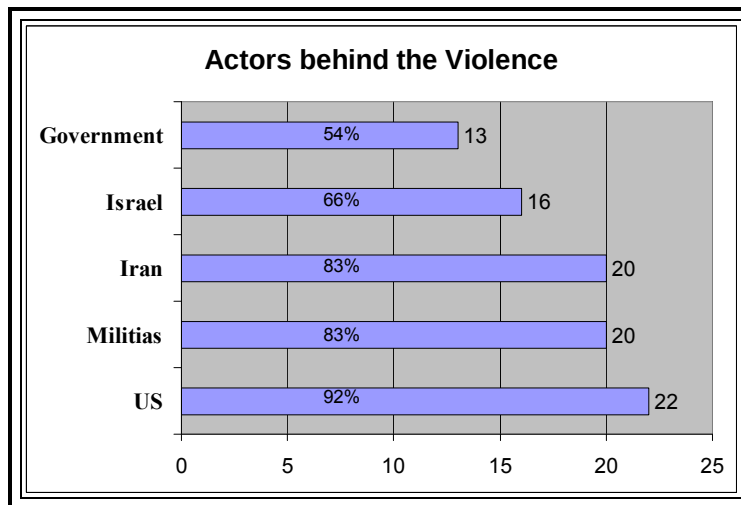


TABLE 9. Perceptions of initiators and/or perpetrators of the violence

Not every respondent states clearly which of these actors should be seen as the initiators and which as the perpetrators, but many do. Partially it can also be deducted from information given by respondent in answer to other questions. In section 6.3 it was pointed out that the ones who have initiated the conflict are considered to be the US, Iran and Israel, and militias and to a lesser extent the government have been argued to conduct the violence throughout the previous chapters and previous sections of this chapter. This section confirms this. The obvious pattern that emerges is that academics perceive the three states –US, Iran and Israel- to be the initiators and the militias

as the actual perpetrators that execute the violence. More than half of the respondents add that the government is actively taking part in the targeting of higher education and backs up the militias. The US is identified by 16 academics as the initiator and by 6 academics as an initiator and perpetrator, through US military forces. One academic mentions the US private security companies (respondent 5). Iran is specifically mentioned as an initiator by 10 academics, and by 10 academics as an initiator and perpetrator, through its intelligence service and its militias. Israel is regarded as only an initiator by 11 academics and as an initiator and perpetrator by another 5 academics. Israel is mainly perceived as a perpetrator by means of its intelligence service and mainly in the first years of the occupation. The 13 academics that mention the Iraqi government as an actor behind the targeting did so on the basis of the view that the government actively supports the occupation by subjecting itself to it and by implementing its ideas into policies, as well as that they are in fact directly linked to the militias.

A much more detailed picture can be obtained from the many linkages academics perceive to be present between the different actors. The majority of academics mentions the US, Iran and Israel together as the initiators, some the US and Iran, and one the US and Israel. In addition, 5 academics explicitly state that the US and Iran are cooperating extensively in the destruction of Iraq. Their relationship is labeled as *'a bond under the tables'* (respondent 2), *'a strategic alliance'* (respondent 7), *'Iran sat at the same table with the US, bargaining with each other'* (respondent 9), *'a high cooperation'* (respondent 10) and *'the US and Persians coordinate in Iraq, that's no secret'* (respondent 12). Iran is said to have helped the US occupy and contain Iraq and in return has received many privileges from the US in terms of granted power. This is also expressed by statements that Iran pulls the strings in the government, together with the US (stated by 10 academics). The argument that Iran and America are completely in charge of the government because they filled the positions with people who are in favor of their ideas and goals only, is frequently given. Also, the US is perceived to have provided the political opportunities for Iran to seize and maintain power.

Out of the 20 academics that identified militias as a set of actors in the violence, 16 identify them specifically as perpetrators. None of the academics specify them as initiators. Another significant pattern that emerges is the common perception that the militias are either directly linked to Iran (10 times), directly to the government (12 times), and directly or indirectly to the US (13 times). Iran is either believed to be equal to the militias, to be directly connected to the militias as militias are their tools of power or their agents of violence, or to supply militias with (Iranian) manpower and specifically train them in Iran. It is emphasized by many respondents that the militias are Shi'a and their leaders have lived in exile in Iran or are in fact fully Iranian, which also reinforces

the view that the militias are directed by Iran (which is ruled and predominantly habituated by Shi'a). Furthermore, 12 academics establish a connection between the Iraqi government and the militias, saying the government directs certain militias or militias have integrated in the government completely. It is argued that militias obtain large amounts of money from the government, and many corrupt mechanisms have been created to accomplish this, like the extortion of civilians for whatever they want to get done at government offices or large-scale fraud with respect to taking possession of part of the profits of infrastructural projects. It demonstrates how political violence is enabled by sufficient resource mobilization (by Iran and the Iraqi government) and by political opportunities (by the Iraqi government), as was pointed out by Della Porta (2008) in her work on the emergence of political violence. It is worthwhile to incorporate some statements about this at this point, for many academics give detailed explanations or examples. The statements also clearly demonstrate the linkages between Shi'a militias and the government and hence, Iran and the government.

Respondent 12: *'The government has Iraqi's in it and military people, soldiers. In fact, 90% of the government are in reality militias.'*

Respondent 7: *'Militias are self sustained by the government. They get a percentage of each project or contract, like infrastructural projects, sewer system...The High Economic Committee of Sadrist Movement takes care of this. And they give it straight to the squads that conduct the killings. [...] This way it is away from the Americans and the government: the money flow can't be traced back, at least not directly. Political parties fight with each other but all agree on the ways and techniques to finish off their opponents. They communicate with each other. The way they work makes cash available to these activities. It has other ways too. They give contracts to fake contractors if this person says: that and that person sent me. They use the money for torture centers, assassinations and the like.'*

Respondent 2: *'Most of the people who now form the Iraqi government stayed in Iran under Saddam. EACH PERSON in the government has their own militia!'*

Respondent 11: *'Until 2007 the perpetrators were the militias: Badr, Al-Mahdi....From then they completed their integration into government, police etc.'*

Respondent 5: *'The parties are getting a lot of support from the government. For example the Ministry of Health it belongs to the Al-Sadr group. So the minister and all his aids are all from Al-Sadr and any contract or anything that you want to do in the Ministry you have to pay. And you have to pay officially and that officially goes to the party. And the Ministry of Commerce also, same thing. So the parties now became very rich and influential.'*

Respondent 6: *'The Jafaari government and the Maliki government are both Shi'a. Before the government was only Sunni so now the Shi'a people want change. They came from outside with their own ideas, they were living in exile for a long time. Jafaari started the attacks, started the sectarian cleansing. And Maliki substituted every responsible person in universities with Shi'a persons.'*

A remarkable finding is that 13 academics are of the opinion that there are linkages between the US and the militias too. This was already hinted at in section 6.4. One academic stated that the US had provided a space for them to take power and that the militias actually used the occupation 'as a tool to seize power', but they operated independently (respondent 1). This is agreed upon by some other academics that state that the chaos created by the occupation directly caused the rise

to power of militias. These are examples of an indirect linkage between the US and militias. The majority however determines a direct connection, with numerous academics being convinced of the direct support of the US to militias. They are believed to be supported by the US financially, but also to be allowed by the US to dominate the country, to infiltrate the government, or are even believed to be primarily initiated by the US and/or used as a tool of power. Clearly, this again confirms the violence is a deliberate and explicit instrument of power, harnessed by the US through militias and directly by militias. It also points out that the US has provided militias with the political opportunities and resources to gain and maintain power, because of which they can execute the political violence. Again, this clarifies how, like Della Porta (2008) argued, political violence is enabled by political opportunities and sufficient resource mobilization. Here, in addition to Iran and the Iraqi government, the US is pinpointed as one of the major parties in these practices.

The US is not only mentioned most often as an actor in the violence, but is also mentioned the most with respect to having connections to and cooperating with the other sets of actors involved. More importantly, the US is defined as the leading initiator or primary responsible actor by no less than 17 academics. In the opinion of these academics, the Americans are the ones who occupied Iraq in the first place, who provoked or directly created the rise to power of Iran and the militias, who put a government in place that supports these practices, and who maintains the status-quo until this day. Some of these statements given are displayed below. The first four statements refer directly to the targeting of academics.

Respondent 1: *'It is about occupation forces directly provoking the current circumstances.'*

Respondent 14: *'The first and last cause of this violence is the American occupant that works on the project of destroying Iraq and its future.'*

Respondent 12: *'Americans have the full power and they support these people. The UK and US support militias, directly or indirectly. They say 'if we don't support them, Al Qaeda comes in'. Openly! Everything happens under the occupation. The US is responsible.'*

Respondent 8: *'This is all stimulation of US people. To get rid of Iraqi society.'*

Respondent 11: *'According to resolution 1483 the UK and US are at power in Iraq. After a long history we finally set rules for occupations in international law. So the first responsible are the occupiers. International law forces occupational forces not to change any basic laws, and puts them in charge of general security. Since the US didn't abide by these rules at all and did not do this, they are the first responsables. They allow secret services from other countries to enter and go about as they wish.'*

This again proves that political violence is enabled by political opportunities and that it is primarily the US that has done so, which makes them primarily responsible for the political violence to occur.

With respect to the other two main initiators –Iran and Israel- significantly more emphasis is put on Iran. Even though the difference in the number of respondents mentioning Iran and Israel is not that big, respectively 20 and 16, the number of times each respondent refers to each of these actors is. Iran is mentioned much more often, and the extent of control they exert on the country today is stressed numerous times. Iran is believed by many to have infiltrated the government via their militias, and their Shi'a militias are perceived to be the main perpetrators of the targeting of academics as well as the most powerful ones in general. Several academics highlight that Iranians have entered the country in very large numbers and have acquired the Iraqi nationality by buying or falsifying Iraqi passports. For example, according to one academic: *'Iran now holds the power in Iraq, even more power than America. Iran has the militias, the money, they dominate in policy, in the government, in the people'* (respondent 2). Iran is to a large extent seen as a direct initiator as well as perpetrator and as an actor that is still largely present in Iraq. The degree of power and control as attributed to Iran is not attributed to Israel, except by one respondent, but this respondent does not clarify his argument. Israel seems to have played a bigger role as an initiator than as a perpetrator, and in the few cases it is perceived as a perpetrator, this is mainly with respect to the specific targeting of highly influential people (among whom are many academics) in the first years of the occupation. None of the respondents specifies Israel as a concrete power pulling the strings in Iraq nowadays.

To resume, the US is seen as the largest actor in the violence. It is perceived to be the principal initiator and responsible actor, and to a lesser extent as a perpetrator in the sense that it directly or indirectly supports the militias, but also because American soldiers and American private security companies conduct assassinations against and employ detention of academics. The second largest player in the targeting is perceived to be Iran, both in terms of being a main initiator and a perpetrator because of their direct link to militias and the large degree of power they now exert in Iraq. The third and final initiator is perceived to be Israel, and to a far lesser extent as a perpetrator too. The main perpetrators of the targeting are thought to be the militias. Mainly they are the ones who actually conduct the killings. A second important perpetrator identified is the Iraqi government, that is believed to facilitate the targeting of academics, either because they support the US and Iran on the one hand, because they directly support the militias, or because they are perceived to be totally equal to the militias: the government is the militias. The many ways in which the actors are perceived to cooperate at some level reinforces the finding that

violence is used as a means to gain and maintain power and political violence is a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. Finally, this subsection revealed how political violence is enabled by political opportunities and sufficient resource mobilization in several ways. Table 10 integrates the findings with respect to the role of the different actors in the conflict and violence into a clarifying figure.

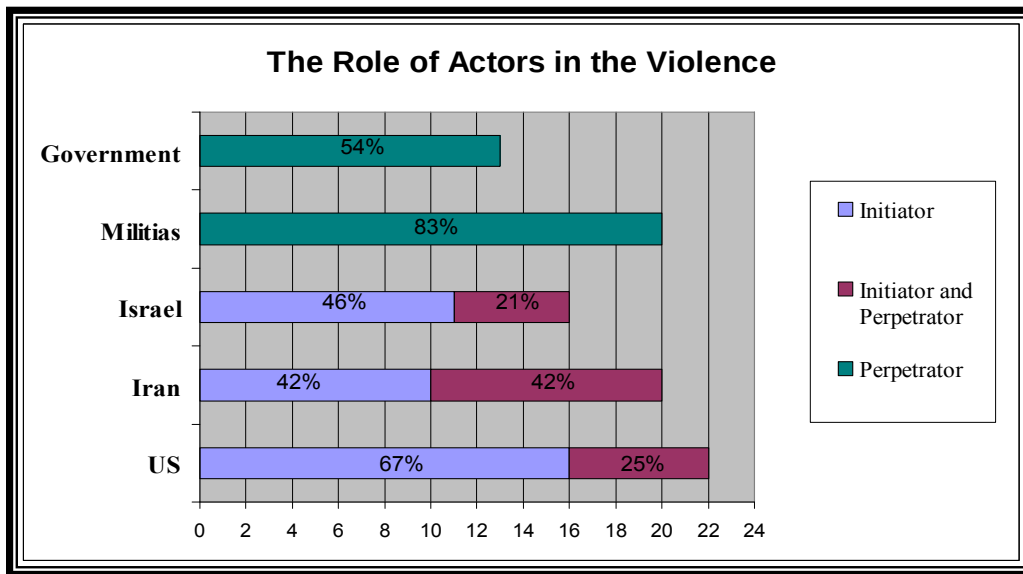


TABLE 10. Specification of initiators and perpetrators in the violence.

6.6 Political violence against higher education: conclusions

In this chapter the collected data on the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence has been analyzed in order to find an answer to the second research subquestion ‘*What are the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against academics in Iraq?*’ The findings provide many useful and remarkably consistent insights.

With respect to the dynamics of political violence, it has been demonstrated that the targeting of academics is perceived to be part of the targeting of higher education as a whole in a deliberate attempt to destroy the pillars of the country and ultimately to destroy Iraq as a nation. This is perceived to be initiated by the US, Iran and Israel to eliminate Iraq as a strategic player in the region. Academics state that the US, Iran and Israel want to gain power within the region and in addition the US wants to obtain Iraq’s oil. Hence, the involvement of these states is based on greed, either greed for political power or greed for economic gain. According to the academics it is mainly the militias that conduct the actual violence, being supported by the Iraqi government.

All these sets of actors are involved in a struggle for power and control in Iraq and employ political violence as a means to gain and maintain power and as a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. They do so by harnessing religion and ethnicity to mobilize identities for conflict and are strongly believed to have deliberately imposed sectarian divisions on Iraqi society, which contributes to the polarization and destruction of Iraqi society. The militias furthermore exert control by the creation and manipulation of fear through the employment of political violence. The emergence of the political violence is perceived to be enabled by the political opportunities the US and to a slightly lesser extent the Iraqi government have created in Iraq for Iran and the militias to gain power and take control over the country, and by the sufficient resource mobilization of militias by the US, Iran and the Iraqi government. Academics note that the US is at the core of the current circumstances for their occupation has directly caused and continues to enable and support the emergence of political violence against academics and higher education, as a result of which higher education has become highly politicized and has deteriorated tremendously.

With respect to the nature of political violence it was concluded that targeted assassination and threatening are the most prominent and recurrent forms of violence, as is politicization of higher education as a non-violent or repressive form of political violence. Kidnapping, expulsion from posts as a repressive form and intimidation are other major forms; and destruction of educational infrastructure, detention, forced migration, de-Ba'atification as a form of expulsion from posts, and torture and other physical violence are less frequent or significant forms. Moreover, the finding that political violence also manifests itself in non-violent or repressive forms is an important contribution to the theory on political violence, for that theory focuses mainly on direct or physical acts of political violence.

In academics' opinion the scale of political violence is a very wide and inclusive one: the violence is directed against the higher education system as a whole and academics from different backgrounds, disciplines, position and age and gender have been targeted. However, connection to the past regime or Ba'athicism was distinguished as a major determinant of political violence, directly followed by political conviction, beliefs or position. Religion and ethnicity play an indirect and secondary role as determinants, for they are only harnessed as such and not determinants by themselves.

It was repeatedly demonstrated the violence against academics and higher education as a whole is believed to have a fundamentally and undeniably political character and serves political interests or goals, as does the conflict at large. This chapter showed how uniform and consistent the academics in this study are in their views on the rationale behind the political violence against

them, and revealed it is academics' unmistakable perception that the targeting of academics in Iraq is deliberate, specific and systematic, and part of the specific and systematic targeting of higher education as a whole in an ongoing attempt to destroy the pillars of the country and ultimately Iraq as a nation.

7. Voices on the Impact of Higher Education on the Violence and Conflict

This chapter sets out to answer the third research subquestion: *‘What is the perceived impact of higher education on the conflict and political violence in Iraq?’* The first section discusses the extent to which academic freedom can be enjoyed in the current Iraqi higher education system (section 7.1). In section 7.2 the extent to which higher education is perceived to reinforce the violence and conflict, i.e. the negative impact of higher education on violence and conflict, is discussed. It is demonstrated that the impediment of academic freedom is at the core of political violence against academics and moreover, at the core of the negative impact higher education has on violence and conflict. Section 7.3 lays out the perceptions on the potential of higher education to mitigate violence and conflict, i.e. the positive impact of higher education on violence and conflict. Section 7.4 contains the conclusion of this chapter.

7.1. The degree of academic freedom

The lack of academic freedom has come repeatedly to the fore and it has been hinted at it is a phenomenon of great importance. However, academic freedom deserves some specific attention as such, for when it is looked at in more detail, it becomes apparent that it might actually be the focal point of the political violence and the destruction of higher education it aims at. This argument will be spelled out in this chapter.

When asked to define academic freedom many definitions are given by respondents. The common characteristic in the definitions is that academic freedom encompasses a set of freedoms to exercise the function of academic properly and independently, without any intervention or restrictions: the freedom to go to work and move around universities freely, the freedom to teach, discuss, write and do research on topics the academic himself or herself deems relevant and important, the freedom to think, to learn about alternative realities and to acquire scientific skills, and to not be hindered by a curriculum on which boundaries are set or by unfair or biased rules and regulations in the hiring and appointing of academic staff or the acceptance, grading or passing of students. To summarize, it is the freedom to learn, teach, think and work and to do so without any fear, or apprehension to face any repercussions for utilizing this freedom.

Out of the 24 respondents, 18 judge academic freedom to be completely absent in the current Iraqi higher education. The remaining 6 state it is very limited. Two of those believe there is some degree of academic freedom left but it is very restricted; one answers there is academic freedom but *‘only for Shi’a and those who work in some party’* (respondent 24); and three believe

it is still possible to enjoy academic freedom in some strictly non-political disciplines such as IT, of which two in addition mention that the change of curriculum and incorporation of religion in all topics mainly occurs in primary and secondary education but to a much lesser extent at universities. They do however emphasize many others ways in which academic freedom is restricted and because of which they actually do fall in the category of academics that perceive academic freedom in higher education to be very limited in Iraq. Table 11 depicts the findings.

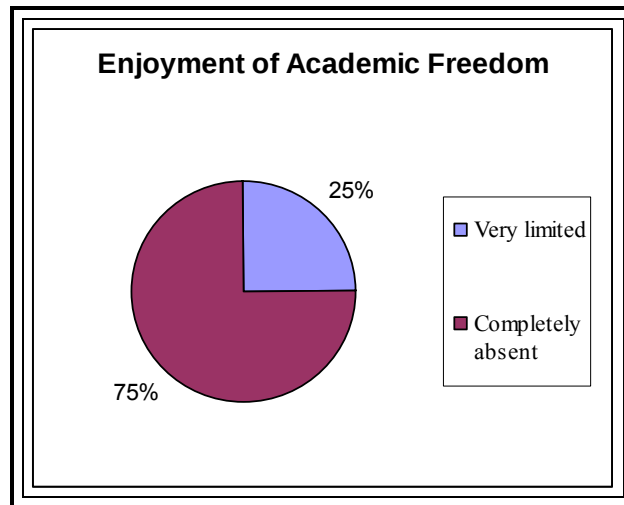


TABLE 11. Perceptions of the degree of academic freedom in Iraq

The fact that 75% perceives academic freedom to be absent and 25% perceives it to be very limited can be entirely attributed to militias' dominance in higher education. In answer to the question who is actually in charge of or who is controlling the universities, 22 academics or 92% point out these are the militias. Two respondents of the questionnaire gave too unclear answers to deduct anything from (respondent 21: *'bunch of losers'* and respondent 23: *'the hidden forces'*). In addition, several academics establish once more a connection between militias and the government, stating that these two sets of actors control higher education because militias belong to the political parties in the government or have completed their integration into the government. The latter means that since 2008 militias are less physically present at universities but are still the ones in charge through the parties in the government. According to some respondents, not all universities are ruled by militias or not all to the same extent. However, the majority of academics state that all universities are controlled by the militias (and/or the government). The fact that no less than 92% of respondents believe the universities to be rendered to the will of militias is another significant indicator of the lack of academic freedom, for it is evident the control is out of academics' hands.

7.2 The negative impact of higher education on violence and conflict

In respondents' answer to the question whether higher education as it is now reinforces or exacerbates the violence against academics or the conflict at large, academic freedom takes a central place. Out of the earlier identified forms of political violence, some in particular seem to have a negative impact on violence and conflict. The different ways in which higher education might or already does contribute to the violence as perceived by academics, are in majority elements of the politicization of higher education, which was already proven to be a major, if non-violent, form of political violence against academics and higher education (see section 5.5 and 6.2). It was argued it is a repressive form of political violence since it constitutes a deprivation of fundamental political rights, such as the violation of freedom of thought, speech or religion (see Salmi 1999,2000). As concluded in the previous section, the impediment of academic freedom also entails a violation of a set of freedoms: to learn, teach, think and work without fear for repercussions for utilizing this freedom. Consequently, the elements of the politicization of higher education that are believed to exacerbate violence and conflict are directly connected to academic freedom: they result in or are even specifically aimed at the impediment of academic freedom. This can also be derived from the many examples academics gave to the questions if academic freedom is enjoyed and who controls universities, which will now be discussed in relation to the negative impact of higher education on the violence and conflict. In this section the research subquestion of what the perceived role of higher education is in reinforcing the violence and conflict in Iraq will be answered.

Three respondents of the questionnaires believe higher education has no or no significant role in exacerbating the violence or conflict, but do not elaborate on their argument. The remaining 21 respondents bring several issues to the fore. The first way in which higher education can be identified to have a negative impact on the conflict is by means of a change of curriculum. Ten academics point out that the curriculum has been changed to serve the occupation and its allies – the US, Iran, the Iraqi government and militias are mentioned, often simultaneously. It is pointed out by respondents that this curriculum change denotes the manipulation of education for political purposes, i.e. to further the goals of the US, Iran, the Iraqi government and the militias and to strengthen their power. It is cited that the curriculum is changed *'towards ideological directions that served the occupation and the government that came along with it [and] to agree with policies of leading militias and parties with ideological and racial views'* (respondent 19), *'in ways that supported the goals of the occupation and its allies'* (respondent 18) or by *'the United States and Iran, who are occupying Iraq to change the curriculum in ways that serve their*

projects' (respondent 14). Examples are given by different respondents such as the change in books of the name of the Arab Gulf into the Persian Gulf¹¹ in geography, the annihilation of everything related to the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s in history, or the substitution of literature from Shakespeare for a conversation between two mullahs (religious leaders) in English language and linguistics. A lot of topics, theories or even entire disciplines are said to be cancelled altogether, as has also been discussed as one of the main changes to higher education since 2003 in section 5.3. One academic gives the example of militias prohibiting foreign languages to be taught, which according to them are '*forbidden by a religious fatwa*' (respondent 14). The pervasiveness of this issue is strongly emphasized. Some examples:

Respondent 10: '*You can't teach students different ideologies and let them choose (what to believe). That is impossible now. Everywhere groups pressure you to some side.*'

Respondent 9: '*Higher education is supposed to be about scientific subjects. It should not be governed by politics. A lot of thinking and theories got cancelled. It is no longer allowed to discuss these during lectures. They got substituted by education that does not live up to international standards.*'

A change of the curriculum on an ideological or political basis is part of the politicization of higher education in the sense that educational content is politicized and is a specific non-violent repressive form of political violence. It may reinforce the conflict because a biased reality is being taught, which Davies (2005) and Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue could hamper students' objective judgment and critical thinking. According to one respondent: '*The change in curriculum contributes, in part, to the rise in the ethnic, religious, and ideological struggle*' (respondent 19). Moreover, it outlines a serious restriction of academic freedom and is even specifically aimed at that: it seeks to restrict academics in their freedom to teach and students in their freedom to learn in an attempt to shape and exert control over the spreading and acquiring of knowledge.

The second way in which higher education currently might have a negative effect is through the created climate of impunity at universities. Nine academics pinpoint the abiding lawlessness in universities: the threat being posed on them by militias and particularly students and the easiness they can get away with it. This was already stressed in section 5.3 in the discussion of the take-over of militias as a major change in higher education since 2003. Other examples of statements regarding the threat from students can be found in section 6.2. Students either exploit the lawlessness for personal interests, such as forcing academics to pass them by threatening them or

¹¹ Iraq, as an Arab country, used to call it Arab Gulf; Persia is another name for Iran. Hence, this means the change of the name of the Gulf implies it now belongs to Iran.

even by using physical violence, or belong directly to a certain militia and should be feared in that respect. Academics cite they are scared to talk openly during lectures for it can never be known which students might belong to militias. The climate of impunity seems to encourage violence against academics directly. More specifically, it is a form of political violence in itself – that is, of indirect violence, which Salmi (1999,2000) defines as violence by omission or the lack of protection of victims of persecution. The climate of impunity hampers academic freedom since academics cannot do their jobs properly and are restricted in their freedom of speech. The latter brings out at the third negative impact of higher education: academics are prevented from speaking openly. This is explicitly mentioned by 9 respondents. They remark academics should be careful not to criticize some group or party or discuss something that might be considered as offensive by some group or party, for it might be a reason to get killed. As one academic notes:

Respondent 5: *'In the beginning or in Saddam-era, you can talk whatever you want except to mention Saddam or his family or the Ba'ath. Now you don't know when you talk who will get upset, because there are too many parties, too many conflicts in the country.'*

Like curriculum change, restriction of freedom of speech is part of the politicization of higher education as a specific non-violent repressive form of the political violence and is obviously a serious impediment of academic freedom. In addition it becomes evident that opposing the set restrictions on academic freedom is an important determinant of political violence. These restrictions are not only a reflection of the conflict having a firm grip on higher education, but also a reinforcement of the conflict, for it prevents academics from teaching students the truth about what is going on in society and from addressing the dangers and nonsense of profound segregation in society. This is in line with how to Davies (2005) and Bush and Saltarelli (2000) state that the failure of schools to stimulate critical thinking, to teach alternative realities and counter stereotyping and prejudices can fuel conflict.

A fourth connection between higher education and the perpetuation of violence and conflict is the imposed sectarianism at universities, referred to by 18 academics. This is also part of the politicization of higher education, as extensively discussed in sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, where it was stated that the politics of sectarianism have penetrated university life and affairs and determine the way the system is organized and run. The manner in which this contributes to violence and conflict is manifested in two ways: first, through imposed fundamentalism and second through imposed segregation on academics and students. Imposed fundamentalism encompasses the increased presence of religious education (mainly in primary and secondary education) and of religious practices in universities which academics have to allow and comply

with (mentioned by 7 academics). If they do not, they run the risk of being eliminated. Again, it shows that opposing the set restrictions on academic freedom, which is what imposed fundamentalism undoubtedly is since it restricts academics in the freedom to teach and work as well as in their freedom of religion, is an important determinant of political violence. The religious practices referred to concern Shi'a rituals only, which can be expected because the militias that took over control are Shi'a. They let religious celebrations take place at the expense of teaching hours: students are set up in lines and conduct the Shi'a ritual of self-inflicting pain, in which one is hitting oneself in honor of the Shi'a prophet and to share in the pain this prophet felt when he was murdered centuries ago. Also, academics state that university walls are covered with religious symbols such as Shi'a flags, religious statements or Quran verses, as are the walls of classrooms. A few examples of statements:

Respondent 4: *'At Al-Mustanseriya University there is Hakim, Sadr, Sistani: it is controlled by Shi'a, with flags and statements. Classrooms become places for religious celebrations, like the Shi'a hitting ritual, self-inflicting pain.'*

Respondent 7: *'The militias say it is a liberation, not an occupation. According to them the US brought justice to 1400 years of oppression of the Shi'a prophet. They feel the US is better than any other Arab government: those wouldn't allow crying for Hussein, self-inflicting pain and all that. [...] I want students to attend classes, not to go out to cry for the prophet.'*

Respondent 12: *'All education is now religious education.'*

Imposed fundamentalism seems to be an example of identity politics, which Davies (2004,2005) argues means transmitting and reinforcing some identity, which in this case is religious (Shi'a) identity, at the expense of others. Della Porta (2008) remarks that groups harness identity politics to derive their explanatory consistency and emotional power from. This is exactly what militias seem to want to achieve by imposing their religious practices at universities: they use it as a justification for the violence they employ and attempt to expand ideological control by this. It is a form of sectarianism, with students and academics being forced to comply with Shi'a practices and beliefs. Sectarianism is also imposed through the segregation militias create at universities, as mentioned by no less than 17 academics. Militias have divided the universities up not by Sunni or Shi'a divisions, but by different groups, mostly different Shi'a groups. Fourteen academics specifically mention that militias that have taken over some university determine the appointing of positions there, especially when the head of the university belongs to a particular militia. Academic positions are granted to members of the militia in question and academics that oppose, speak out against or do not fit the ideological system of the militia in question are kicked out, killed or forced to comply, which again underlines that the politicization of higher education seriously restricts academic freedom and opposing it means provoking targeting. Some academics

even mention that fake certificates have been granted to militia members in order to facilitate hiring them for academic positions. One academic emphasizes this happens very openly since special offices have been opened in Baghdad whose primary task it is to issue fake degrees and certificates upon payment (see statements below). These practices enable the ruling out of academics whose ideas are not in line with the sectarian ideas of the militia that took over the university – hence, it is illustrative of segregation between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, or supporters and non-supporters of the militias and their mode of operation.

Respondent 19: *‘The control of sectarian parties over universities’ administrations [means] granting scholarship to these parties’ members without earning them and without paying any consideration to the common criteria of administration.’*

Respondent 9: *‘They want to get rid of educated people or thinkers to replace them with their own people. They even award fake degrees to accomplish this. They allowed the opening of offices and centers in the city who give out fake degrees and certificates. So this is done very visibly and openly.’*

Respondent 8: *‘Militias control some universities, the religious leaders govern them. They expelled some of the lecturers they don’t like and control the way of who gets in.’*

Respondent 11: *‘The militias integrated everywhere. Like the way the government is sectarian, they did the same with universities. So they determine the appointing of people? And what about students’ admission and attendance? YES, of course, they determine that completely!’*

The last statement discloses the perception that militias have imposed segregation on students too. According to 6 academics militias have created segregation among students. Students loyal to sects are favored in spite of others and the acceptance, passing and graduation of students is dependent on and eased by their ties to militias or by political connections. Three academics disagree that militias directly control the attendance and acceptance of students, but acknowledge they may be pressuring students from other groups to leave by creating fear and demanding compliance. Either way, it is highlighted by all these 17 respondents that segregation has taken place to a large extent. The identified ways of segregation demonstrate that, like Davies (2005) argues, mechanisms of biased selection are used to reproduce inequality between those who can enjoy opportunities to take part in higher education and those who are excluded, and thereby reproduce the roots of the conflict, which is based on a struggle for power and control and is perpetuated by an unequal distribution of that power and control.

On the next page, table 12 displays the findings on the extent to and ways in which academics believe sectarianism is present at universities.

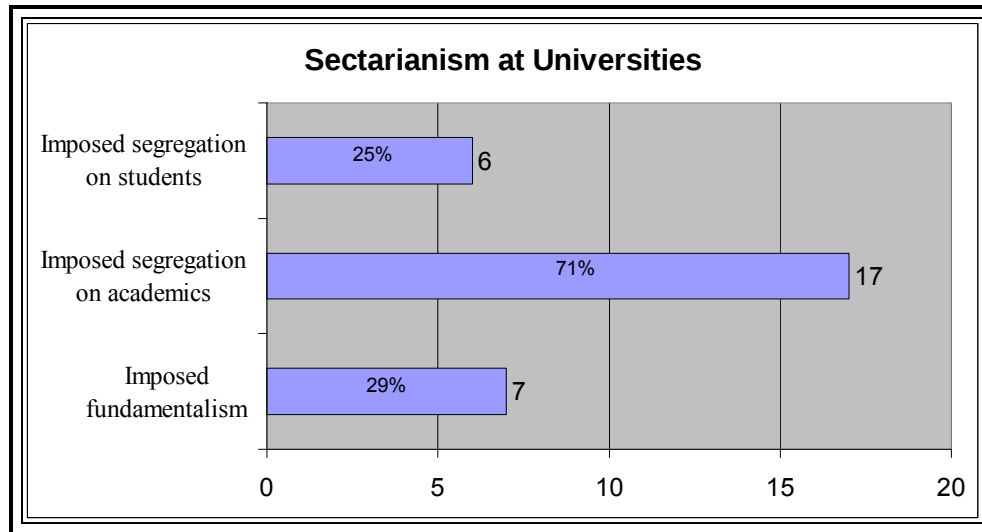


TABLE 12. *Perceived levels of sectarianism at universities*

Clearly, sectarian segregation and fundamentalism at universities reproduce the elements underpinning the conflict in the larger society by promoting sectarian divisions and furthering the political struggle for power and control, and thereby reinforce the foundation the conflict is built on and reinforce its manifestations. Additionally, the complete level of control militias exert at universities may also directly increase the violence against academics because it has created an environment, or climate of impunity, by which violence is facilitated and in which it is normalized. Nonetheless, two respondents state it does not aggravate the conflict as such because the majority of Iraqis, neither students nor staff, believe in such fundamentalism and segregation, and is very much able to recognize the unjustness of this and oppose it accordingly. One academic even states that the segregation between different groups and their physical distance from each other actually decreases the violence (respondent 6). Either way, it contributes to the undermining of academic freedom and reproduces the conflict in the larger society, extending its impact to higher education.

The fifth and most direct way in which higher education aggravates the violence and conflict is that it is harnessed to spread propaganda and promote hatred. Ten academics believe this to be the case. They stress that higher education as it is now is both a consequence and a cause of the violence: militias turned higher education into a field for political and ideological struggle and it is used as such to encourage division and opposition between groups (see also section 5.4). Academics quote that students are introduced to sectarian ideas and policies, as are academics. Fuelling hatred against other sects and groups is believed to be a specific and deliberate tactic to perpetuate the already existing tensions and violence. This is line with Davies (2004, 2005) who

noted that the stressing of ‘otherness’ politicizes identity, which polarizes relationships and mobilizes identities for conflict, and fuels conflict in this way. Furthermore, and in line with how Thompson (2006) states conflicts are perpetuated, this is done by means of the harnessing of religion and ethnicity or in other words sectarianism. Some examples of statements are given below.

Respondent 10: *‘In higher education they create issues able to conflict in any time. There is no university in the whole world where doctors and professors belong to militias and parties. Universities must be science producers. They can’t be that in this way. [...] YES YES it increases conflict, they want that and it is what they do. Yes, they promote hatred. [...] I heard from many of my colleagues, they talk about new policies, system that increases conflict and hate. If you don’t get killed when you don’t comply, you will get fired.’*

Respondent 9: *‘They destroyed the entire system. It was victim in the beginning. Now they’ve replaced the system with hatred, sectarianism, and political interests.’*

Respondent 6: *‘The current educational objective is to use universities to introduce students to sectarian ideas. Society confronts, opposes this. Universities are used as propaganda. Fuelling hatred is exactly the tactic. It is like a sleeping volcano.’*

The abuse of higher education to further political goals and encourage violence and conflict is an obvious form of the politicization of higher education and is a direct restriction of academic freedom, for no such freedom exists in a system like that. Once more, this is a way in which political violence aims at and results in the restriction of academic freedom and does so in a non-violent or repressive manner. The promotion of hatred through higher education is a direct attempt to aggravate the violence as well as the conflict. According to some academics however, it has no actual effect because Iraqis do not believe in sectarianism and its violent manifestations. In the table below the findings on the different ways in which higher education impacts negatively on violence and conflict as perceived by academics are displayed (Table 13).

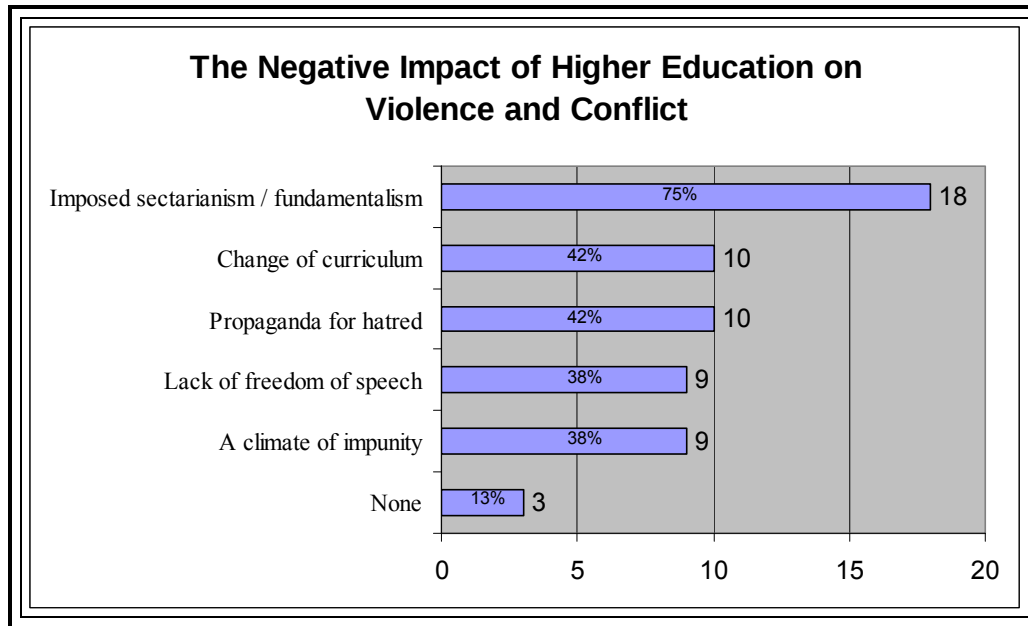


TABLE 13. Perceived ways in which higher education reinforces violence and conflict

In answer to the research subquestion what the perceived role of higher education is in reinforcing the violence and conflict in Iraq, it can be concluded higher education impacts negatively on both violence and conflict in several ways. With 75% of respondents citing it, imposed sectarianism, in terms of segregation and fundamentalism, is the largest element through which higher education has a negative effect, both in facilitating the violence and in reinforcing the conflict by using identity politics and reproducing inequality respectively. The change of curriculum and propaganda for hatred at universities are both mentioned by 42% of the respondents. The former has a negative impact on the reinforcement of conflict because it leads to biased thinking and the latter is perceived to impact negatively on both the encouragement and promotion of violence and the exacerbation of the conflict through the polarization of relationships and the mobilizing of identities for conflict. Lack of freedom of speech is cited by 38% as an element with a negative impact, namely by reinforcing the conflict because of a biased spread of knowledge. The climate of impunity in universities is also cited by 38% of the respondents as having a negative impact; by facilitating and promoting the violence. Put differently, higher education is perceived to reinforce the *conflict* mainly by imposed segregation and fundamentalism, followed by curriculum change and propaganda for hatred, and lastly by the lack of freedom of speech. Higher education is perceived to exacerbate the *political violence* against academics mainly through imposed segregation and fundamentalism, secondly by

propaganda for hatred and thirdly by the ruling climate of impunity, which facilitates all of the previously mentioned.

With the exception of climate of impunity, all these issues constitute elements of the politicization of higher education, which was already confirmed to be a major form of non-violent, repressive political violence against academics and higher education in section 5.5 and 6.2. In this section it was argued that the climate of impunity is also a non-violent form of political violence, namely of indirect political violence. This section also illuminated how these non-violent forms of political violence are resulting in or even primarily aimed at the restriction of academic freedom. The impediment of academic freedom allows for the militias to stay in control of university affairs and policies and educational content, allows them to reproduce and reinforce the features of the larger conflict in higher education, and enables the facilitation and encouragement of violence against academics. This illustrates how the impediment of academic freedom is the major manner through which the violence and conflict are aggravated. It was demonstrated in this section that academic freedom is at the core of the political violence: most of the political violence is aimed at the restriction of academic freedom, and opposing the set restrictions on academic freedom is a major determinant of political violence: who does so runs a great risk of being targeted. This points out that not only non-violent forms of political violence are aimed at restricting academic freedom, but in the end the direct forms of political violence are too: ultimately, the killing, threatening etcetera of academics is aimed at silencing them and ruling them out as influential players, or ruling them out in any way. Essentially it leaves academics fearful to utilize the academic freedom they were used to and should be able to enjoy. Although not always mentioned explicitly, it clearly comes to the fore that academics really live their lives in fear, which is also exactly what the political violence is intended to accomplish. Salmi (1999,2000) distinguishes 'living in fear' as a form of violence too; that is, it is a deprivation of higher rights, or alienating violence. Hence, political violence –whether repressive, direct, indirect or alienating violence- is aimed at and actually succeeds in the impediment of academic freedom in order to exert control over higher education and to diminish its role as a system of freedom, independence and critical thinking that enhances society. It confirms that academic freedom indeed plays a large role in the political violence, as was argued in the background chapter on Iraq (chapter 3, see Jawad 2007) and specifies in which ways exactly. These are new findings, since academic freedom takes no place in the scientific literature on education and conflict, or in the literature on political violence.

7.3 The positive impact of higher education on violence and conflict

Alternatively, it was researched in what way higher education might or could have a positive impact on violence and conflict, i.e. if it has potential to mitigate the violence and conflict. In this section answer is provided to the research subquestion what the perceived potential of higher education is to mitigate the violence and conflict.

Not surprisingly, the academics are very pessimistic about the future of higher education. They were asked what the implication of all the identified changes and challenges are for the future of higher education in Iraq, and what it all means for the future of Iraqi society. Without exception, the academics pronounce the future of higher education is seriously endangered. The answers given are remarkably homogeneous. A lot of academics perceive its future to be dark (*'dark and disastrous future'*, *'very dark'*, *'dead-end dark future'*, *'dark prospect'*, *'black future'*). Some describe it as *'no future'* or say there will be not much left of higher education if things continue like they do now (*'deterioration and backwardness'*, *'underdevelopment and degrading'*, *'degraded level and unrecognized universities'*). Academics were also asked if anything had been undertaken to prosecute or punish the perpetrators of the violence against academics. This is another strong indicator of the dark future of higher education. Three respondents did not answer the question. All the academics that did, i.e. 21 respondents or 88%, answered this question with a clear-cut 'no'. Six of them underlined that the perpetrators are not punished and moreover will never be, for the simple reason that the government is in support of the violence against academics and the perpetrators are in fact directly related to or part of the government.

Respondent 11: *'No of course not. The ones who did this belong to militias and are the same people as in the government. They won't punish themselves.'*

Respondent 1: *'Prosecute them is impossible because this would have to be done through the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense. Both are ruled by the militias!'*

This can also be deduced from the finding that many respondents perceive the government and militias to be equal to each other, and to be the main perpetrators (see section 6.5 and 6.6). Four respondents emphasize that the US has a role in the non-prosecution of perpetrators, stating that it has an obligation under law to prosecute perpetrators and protect civilians but refrains from doing so. One academic feels that *'the Americans and English only care for their security, their safety'* (respondent 12). Or as another respondent puts it:

Respondent 3: *'If a person kills an American soldier this is a crime, if an Iraqi kills another Iraqi this is a normal crime. But if an American kills an Iraqi, this is his job. You see how things are build as a new logic?'*

The fact that perpetrators go unpunished again confirms and reinforces the finding that the political violence against academics takes place in and is characterized by a climate of impunity, not only at universities but also and perhaps even more importantly in the whole society. This is an important finding. It highlights that nothing has been undertaken to put a halt to the violence, which means the targeting can continue in an unlimited way and pace and indicates again that the future of higher education is far from promising. Academics are equally pessimistic about the future of Iraqi society as a consequence of the deterioration of higher education. Like they did in describing the role of higher education since 2003 in section 5.2, the vast majority of respondents establishes the link between a well-functioning higher education system and the advancement of a society. It is frequently stated that the deterioration or destruction of higher education inevitably leads to the deterioration and destruction of Iraq as a society. The targeting of academics has left higher education void of many highly qualified and prominent people. In addition, the large impediment of academic freedom does the rest. Without a solid academic framework – knowledge-creation, knowledge-transfer and applied research- the society is crippled from any kind of progress. Future generations are deprived from their opportunities. Iraq will be a country of underdevelopment and backwardness. It is worthwhile to incorporate some of the statements that illustrate this point of view:

Respondent 6: *'They send Iraq back to medieval times. They emptied Iraq from the intellectual class.'*

Respondent 17: *'It means that Iraq will undergo a process that will change it from having a bright and prosperous future to one that has a dark future and that is incapable of achieving any progress in any fields that provide a decent life for the Iraqi citizen.'*

Respondent 19: *'It means that there will be a decrease of the scientific level and limiting of the role of people with qualification in building and advancing the society.'*

Respondent 22: *'A future of any society is definitely linked with the progress that its academics achieve. If things go on like this, and no immediate solutions are taken, we will be the most uncivilized country in the world.'*

With respect to the general future of Iraq it is also frequently addressed that without any immediate and radical solutions, Iraq will suffer from increased division and as a consequence will break apart. As one respondent metaphorically puts it:

Respondent 4: *'Iraq is now an open space for security forces for their own agenda to implement. In Arabic there is a saying which means approximately: "when the camel falls down, they come from everywhere to stab knives in him". This is Iraq now.'*

With such a pessimistic perspective on the future of higher education and Iraqi society in general, it appears that the role higher education can play in mitigating the violence is likely to be very limited. This is confirmed by the answers academics gave to the question if higher education

could take the lead in forcing changes upon society, i.e. if it could play a role in mitigating the conflict or encourage peace. Eight academics believe higher education could play this role in principle, but cannot under these circumstances. These academics stress strongly that first and foremost the occupation must get out, since higher education has deteriorated as a direct consequence of and through the fault of the occupation. This reconfirms earlier findings (see the concluding sections of chapter 5 and 6). Freeing Iraq from occupation also entails freeing it from any foreign intervention – that is, not only from the US occupant but also from Iranian forces and its militias, as well as from the current Iraqi government. It is the shared perception of these academics that if higher education is given a true chance, it could play a positive role, but currently any role is impossible due to the continued destruction of higher education by forces of the occupation. Another 7 academics believe that higher education can mitigate the conflict based on the argument that the higher education system in Iraq used to be a very good and strong one and that higher education equips a society with many capabilities. However, none of these academics says higher education actually already *does* play this role. Moreover, they have specified elsewhere that the current higher education is not merely what it has been before the occupation and do not specify how it can play a role under current circumstances. It implies that these academics too agree on the very limited potential of higher education as it is now to actually generate positive effects. A final category concerns the academics that do not believe higher education is equipped with the potential to take the lead in producing any positive changes at all (cited by 4 academics). These academics stress that any change in society should come from political power. For the conflict to be mitigated, the political system should be replaced for a political system that has academics' interests at heart as opposed to the currently ruling politicians who are unable or unwilling to ensure security for academics and to do anything constructive for higher education in general. From the remaining six respondents the data is missing. It can be concluded that higher education as it is now cannot play any significant role because of the many restrictions and limitations it faces due to the current political situation and the targeted undermining of the higher education system as part of it, which highlights the political nature of the violence and conflict once more. However, the majority of 58% of respondents believes it *could* play a role if only it was brought back to its pre-occupational state (Table 14).

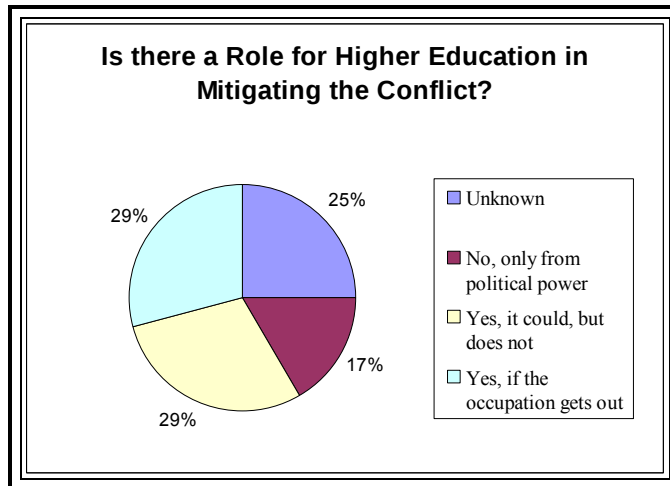


TABLE 14. Perceptions on the potential of higher education to mitigate the conflict

Finally, respondents were asked how higher education can be improved, what has priority, and what should change for them personally to consider going back and resuming their position. Because respondents gave the same answers to these questions they will be discussed simultaneously. Again, most respondents directly blame the occupation for the current state of higher education: 16 academics identify that termination of the occupation has priority in improving the higher education sector, as well as the abolishment of all rules and systems brought along by the occupation and imposed on the sector. These 16 academics also state that only if the occupation and its allies (Iran, militias and the Iraqi government) leave the country they might consider returning to Iraq, for the occupation and its allies are perceived to maintain and exacerbate the situation. This finding is thus once more confirmed. Therefore, related to the desire for the occupation to leave is the expressed desire of substitution of the representatives in the current Iraqi government, mentioned by 7 academics. They determine a change in '*regime*', '*the political process*', '*politics*' or plainly '*change of government*' has priority in improving higher education and is the minimum requirement to return to Iraq. Next, five academics state that putting a halt to the extent of control militias exert at universities should be addressed to improve higher education and in order for them to go back. In this respect academics specifically mention the politicization of higher education by militias and them turning it into an ideological field. The higher education system should stop to be run on the basis of politics and ideology. Furthermore, 6 academics state professional standards should be reintroduced and should be respected like they were prior to the occupation, which entails the termination of favoritism and selectivity both with respect to academics and students, and allowing Ba'athist academics to

resume their positions. Four academics emphasize the law must be reinforced, both in universities and in the wider society, and the perpetrators of the crimes must be brought to justice. This represents bringing a halt to the climate of impunity. Finally, for 6 academics the most important thing to improve higher education and to consider going back is that their safety and security is ensured. They state that no improvements can be accomplished before a basic level of security is present. Below these findings are integrated in a table (Table 15).

Priorities in Improving Higher Education and Conditions to Go Back		
Occupation must leave	Change of government	Termination of militias' political and ideological control
67% (16)	29% (7)	21% (5)
Reintroducing and respecting professional standards	Safety and security	End of climate of impunity
25% (6)	25% (6)	17% (4)

TABLE 15. Perceptions on required improvements in higher education and on conditions of returning to Iraq

In conclusion, the answer to the research subquestion of what the perceived potential of higher education is to mitigate the violence and conflict is very negative. 17% of respondents believe it could never play a role, and 58% believes it could but not under the current occupation, which has degraded higher education to such an extent that it only has a negative impact on violence and conflict. Some more detailed information was gained from the possible improvements to higher education that respondents quoted. Again, the occupation is seen as the main cause of the deprived state of higher education. 67% of respondents state that to improve higher education it has priority that the occupation gets out. A change of government is explicitly mentioned as a priority by 29% of respondents and the termination of militias control over higher education by 21%. However, these latter two categories are probably part of the identified priority of termination of the occupation since the vast majority perceives the current government and the

militias as part of or at the very least directly linked to the occupation, as was extensively shown before in chapter 6. Other priorities in improving higher education are a return to professional standards (25%), general safety and security (25%) and the ending of the climate of impunity (17%), all of which are also perceived to be a direct result of the occupation. These factors are simultaneously the basic requirements respondents have to return to Iraq and resume their positions. According to academics, the termination of the occupation has undeniably major priority in every respect.

7.4 The impact of higher education on violence and conflict: conclusions

This chapter disclosed academics' perception of how the current higher education system impacts or might impact on the violence and conflict, either negatively or positively. Now, an answer to the broader third research subquestion '*What is the perceived impact of higher education on the conflict and political violence in Iraq?*' can be formulated. It can be concluded that higher education in Iraq nowadays is perceived to have a severely negative impact on violence and conflict due to its strongly politicized nature. The politicization of higher education is a major form of political violence being harnessed against academics and higher education as a whole, albeit non-violently. Four out of the five issues that academics identify as having a negative impact on the violence and conflict are part of the politicization of higher education: imposed segregation and fundamentalism form the largest category, followed by curriculum change and propaganda for hatred, and finally by the lack of freedom of speech. These are repressive forms of political violence because they constitute a deprivation of fundamental political rights, i.e. a violation of the freedom of thought, speech and religion. A final issue through which higher education is perceived to have a negative impact is the climate of impunity. In answer to the question if the perpetrators of the violence are being prosecuted or punished, all respondents underline this is not the case – hence, the climate of impunity is a factor of major importance in the perpetuation of the violence. Although it certainly provokes violence on a large scale, in itself it represents a non-violent form of political violence: it is a form of indirect political violence, or violence by omission.

Furthermore, it was shown that all these issues are directly connected to the restriction of academic freedom: they are either specifically aimed at or successfully result in the impediment of academic freedom. Academic freedom was defined as the freedom to learn, teach, think and work and to do so without any fear, or apprehension to face any repercussions for utilizing this freedom. It is through the politicization of higher education as a repressive form of political

violence and the climate of impunity as an indirect form of political violence that this freedom is violated. Moreover, it was argued that killing, threatening etcetera as direct forms of political violence and finally the living in fear as a alienating form of political violence, are ultimately aimed at and resulting in the violation of academic freedom too. The vast majority of respondents states that academic freedom is completely absent in Iraq nowadays and universities have been taken over by militias completely. It is through the political violence –whether repressive, direct, indirect or alienating political violence- that academic freedom is restricted, and through the restriction of academic freedom that the violence and conflict are reproduced and exacerbated. The insight emerged that academic freedom is at the core of political violence against academics: first, all of the forms of political violence are ultimately aimed at the restriction of academic freedom to exert control over higher education and to diminish its vital role in society; second, it is via this channel that violence and conflict are reinforced; and third, opposing the set restrictions on academic freedom is a major determinant of political violence: who does so runs a great risk of being targeted.

With respect to the (potential) positive impact of higher education in violence and conflict a very grim picture is portrayed: the vast majority states higher education has no potential to contribute to the mitigation of violence and the establishment of peace because it continues to be deliberately hampered through the politicization of higher education by the occupation and its allies, which has created a climate of impunity in which the targeting of academics goes unhindered and unpunished and which has fostered a complete degradation of higher education. Consequently, the majority of respondents states the termination of the occupation has priority: priority in terms of improving the current state of higher education, priority in terms of enabling it to play a positive role in mitigating violence and conflict, and priority in terms of the conditions academics have to return to Iraq and resume their positions. A change of government and the termination of militias' political and ideological control were less frequently mentioned as priorities in improving higher education and basic conditions to go back, but they can be regarded as the desire for the occupation to get out, for the government and the militias are perceived to be part of the occupation and it is the occupation that has created and continues to maintain the status-quo (see also chapter 6). These viewpoints reconfirm once more that the occupation is primarily responsible for the current plight of Iraqi academics and the current deteriorated state of higher education in Iraq. Other issues identified as ways in which higher education can be improved and basic conditions for academics to go back were reintroducing and respecting professional standards in higher education, ensuring academics' safety and security by political forces, and the end of the climate of impunity. However, it is academics' unmistakable perception

that higher education's potential to mitigate the violence and conflict is primarily dependent on the termination of the occupation, for it is the occupation that hampers its functioning and eliminates its potential positive impact on society.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter the most important findings are discussed and are put together in larger perspective. It is briefly mentioned what the research entailed and how it was set up in section 8.1, followed by a summary of the main results in section 8.2. Finally, recommendations for further research on the basis of the findings and limitations of this study are laid out in section 8.3.

8.1 Research questions, design and purpose

With this research it was sought to make a contribution to determine the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against academics in Iraq and to obtain insights into the interrelatedness of higher education, political violence and conflict. The central question on which this research was based, was formulated as follows: *How do Iraqi academics perceive the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against them in post-2003 occupied Iraq and how do they perceive the relationship between the current conflict situation and higher education?* The political violence against academics in Iraq has emerged since the US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and is undoubtedly a serious issue that needs to be addressed, but the features of and rationale behind the political violence against academics in Iraq remains largely unknown. Furthermore, in-dept research into its relation to the functioning of higher education and the conflict situation in general remains absent too. From the literature on education, conflict and political violence it came to the fore that conflict has many detrimental effects on education. It is increasingly acknowledged that targeted political violence against the education sector is one of these effects, and is a growing phenomenon that needs to be explained and curtailed. Finally, the literature pointed out that education has an impact on conflict: it may reinforce or exacerbate violence and conflict, or may mitigate violence and conflict. But theoretically speaking too there is relatively little known about the relationships between conflict and education, and even less on the role and place of political violence in this. On the basis of the discussed literature three broad subquestions for the research were formulated: (1) what the perceived impact of the political violence and conflict is on higher education, (2) what the perceived scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against academics are, and (3) what the perceived impact of higher education on the political violence and conflict is. The empirical research was conducted in Jordan and Syria by means of a case study among Iraqi academics that have fled Iraq at some point after the

US invasion of 2003 (except for 2 that left before 2003 and one that has not left at all). In total, 12 interviews were held with and 12 questionnaires were completed by Iraqi academics. Lastly, various types of documents were studied, analyzed and incorporated in sketching the background to the conflict, political violence and higher education in Iraq.

8.2 Summary of main findings

Based on the findings of the results chapters an answer can be formulated to the central question *‘How do Iraqi academics perceive the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against them in post-2003 occupied Iraq and how do they perceive the relationship between the current conflict situation and higher education?’*

As to the impact of the conflict on higher education, it was pointed out that academics perceive that the conflict, or more specifically the occupation, has strongly affected the functioning of higher education, and in detrimental ways only. They explain that the role of higher education has become and continues to be extremely marginalized as a direct consequence of the occupation, and the positive role it had prior to the occupation in advancing Iraqi society has been wiped out. This is mainly due to the politicization of the system, which is characterized by the take-over of universities by political parties and militias exercising sectarian practices and a political environment hostile towards academics and higher education. Respondents declare that the US, the Iraqi government and the militias have politicized educational content and have politicized the way in which the higher education system is organized, managed and run, and in which favoritism, selectivity, repressiveness and corruption on the bases of sectarianism now prevail. This has fostered an environment in which the large-scale and specific targeting of academics for political reasons takes place, and which has resulted in and is reflected by a complete degradation of higher education.

As to the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence the most important findings are that the violence is perceived to be undoubtedly politically motivated and is not just targeted at academics, but targeted at the higher education system as a whole. It was repeatedly demonstrated that in academics’ opinion, the political violence has a fundamentally and undeniably political character: it is employed by actors that are part of the political power in Iraq and serves political interests or goals, as does the conflict at large.

The scale of political violence seems to be a very wide and inclusive one: academics from different backgrounds, disciplines, position and age and gender have been targeted, and more importantly, the violence is targeted at the entire higher education system in general. It was

argued that the nature of political violence does not only encompass direct forms such as the killing, threatening, kidnapping and intimidation of academics, but also repressive forms such as the politicization of higher education and expulsion from posts, a climate of impunity as an indirect form, and imposing living in fear on academics as a alienating form of political violence. With respect to the dynamics of political violence, the targeting of academics is perceived to be part of the targeting of higher education as a whole in a deliberate attempt to destroy the pillars the country is built on, and ultimately to destroy Iraq as a nation. The violence, and also the conflict in general, is believed to be initiated by the US, Iran and Israel, in order to eliminate Iraq as a strategic player in the region. Academics state that the US and Iran are still actively involved in promoting the violence (whereas Israel appears to be not) and state that they play the most dominant role in the violence up until now. Academics pinpointed that the perpetrators, or the actors that conduct the actual violence, are mainly the militias, being supported by the Iraqi government. The emergence of the political violence was explained to be enabled by the political opportunities the US and to a slightly lesser extent the Iraqi government have created in Iraq for Iran and the militias to gain power, and by the sufficient resource mobilization of militias by the US, Iran and the Iraqi government. It was demonstrated that these parties –the US, Iran, the Iraqi government and militias- are involved in a struggle for power and control in Iraq and employ political violence as a means to gain and maintain power by ruling out academics and by diminishing higher education's role: political violence, in all its forms, is used as a deliberate and explicit instrument of power. According to academics they have imposed sectarian divisions on Iraqi society and thereby harness religion and ethnicity to mobilize identities for conflict, and use the political violence to create and manipulate fear. It is strongly felt that the US is at the core of the current circumstances for their occupation has directly caused and continues to enable and support the emergence of political violence against academics and higher education, as a result of which higher education has become highly politicized and has deteriorated tremendously.

As to the impact higher education has on the political violence and conflict, it was concluded that higher education has a severely negative impact only, due to its strongly politicized nature that is in support of the political goals behind the violence and conflict. The manners through which higher education is believed to reinforce or exacerbate the violence and conflict comprise repressive forms of political violence (imposed sectarianism in terms of imposed segregation and imposed fundamentalism, followed by curriculum change and propaganda for hatred, and then by a lack of freedom of speech) and indirect forms of political violence (a climate of impunity). Moreover, it was demonstrated that academic freedom is at the core of political violence against academics. Firstly, all forms of employed political violence –whether direct, indirect, repressive,

or alienating violence- ultimately result in or are even specifically aimed at the restriction of academic freedom. Secondly, it is via this channel that academics perceive violence and conflict is reinforced and exacerbated. And thirdly, opposing the set restrictions on academic freedom is a major determinant of political violence: academics declared that who does so runs a great risk of being targeted. Academic freedom was defined as the freedom to learn, teach, think and work and to do so without any fear, or apprehension to face any repercussions for utilizing this freedom. The vast majority of respondents stated that academic freedom is completely absent in Iraq nowadays and universities are completely rendered to the will of militias.

The vast majority of respondents also stated higher education has no potential to contribute to the mitigation of violence and the establishment of peace because it continues to be deliberately hampered through the politicization of higher education by the occupation and its allies. Consequently, the majority of respondents stated the termination of the occupation has top priority in every respect: priority in terms of improving the current state of higher education, priority in terms of enabling it to play a positive role in mitigating violence and conflict, and priority in terms of the conditions academics have to return to Iraq and resume their positions. Furthermore, academics declared that with the prevailing climate of impunity in which the violence against academics and against the higher education system can be employed unhindered and goes unpunished, any improvement of the situation is made impossible.

The seriousness of the problem of political violence and the major negative impacts it has on higher education and Iraqi society in general needs to be acknowledged, and the deliberate strategy motivated by political interests to inflict harm on academics and the higher education system needs to be addressed. An opening to put a halt to the continuing deterioration of higher education and to restore its vital role in society can only be provided when the system is freed from the current political interference and instruction. And only then an opening is provided to protect academics and to curtail the highly disturbing large-scale violence against them.

8.3 Recommendations for further research

This study was of explorative nature and has provided a starting point by obtaining valuable insights to explain the scale, nature and dynamics of political violence against academics and higher education in the conflict in Iraq, and to explain the broader relationships between these issues. Even though the respondents in this study comprised a varied group of academics and even though the respondents displayed highly consistent and homogeneous views, it is possible that the relatively small number of respondents (24) participating in this study and the fact that

the vast majority no longer resides in Iraq has created a distorted image of reality. Hence, it is urged that this research is repeated among a larger number of respondents, in which women should constitute a larger category than they did in this study and more academics that continue to reside in Iraq should be incorporated. Moreover, it is encouraged further research also incorporates the viewpoints of other educational staff as well as students, to supplement and contrast that to the displayed views of academics. It is suggested that, like in this study, further research employs quantitative research methods besides qualitative methods. Quantitative research could generate more solid statements about the scale and nature of political violence and about the causal relations between conflict, political violence and higher education by providing statistical evidence. However, due to the complexity and sensitive nature of the topic, additional and fundamental qualitative research methods are required and are of crucial importance.

Furthermore and more generally, this study provided some valuable insights into the central role political violence plays in the impact of conflict on higher education, and into its central role in the impact of higher education on conflict. It is likely that the specific relationships and the manner of influence of political violence are specific to the Iraqi case. However, the findings that political violence against higher education does not only encompass direct or physical forms of violence, but also many non-violent forms of political violence, which together are aimed at destroying the foundation of the country through the destruction of higher education, might be generalizable to many cases and might constitute the common core or shared characteristics of political violence against education globally. More research into other cases of political violence against academics and (higher) education is required to determine whether the findings can be generalized to other cases than the Iraqi case. Also, more research is required to underpin and verify the finding that political violence against education consists of both violent (direct) and non-violent (indirect, repressive and alienating) forms, for this is a new finding and is not discussed as such in the existing literature on political violence against education.

Finally, this study has brought to the fore that the impediment of academic freedom is a phenomenon of major importance in the relationships between conflict, political violence and higher education. This too, takes no explicit place in the current literature in the education-conflict field, nor in the literature on political violence against education. It is identified as an important area in which further research is recommended to exactly determine how political violence restricts academic freedom, how the restriction of academic freedom is increasing political violence and reinforcing conflict and ultimately leads to the undermining of a country's foundation, and to how the likelihood of targeting is increased if academics refuse to or are unable to comply with the set restrictions on academic freedom.

9. Literature

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide (original version)

Appendix 2: Questionnaire in English

Appendix 3: Questionnaire in Arabic

Appendix 1: Interview Guide (original version)

Explain research, stress voluntary nature, ensure anonymity, ask if interview can be recorded

Personal data

Age:

Gender:

Discipline:

Left Iraq in:

For the reason of:

1. Impact of Conflict and Political Violence on Higher Education

- A) What was the state/role of higher education before 2003 and what is it now? Which changes can be identified?
- B) Which are the main challenges that academics face since 2003?
 - Destruction of educational infrastructure?
 - De-Ba'athification?
 - Militias taking over?
 - US dominancy?
 - Safety?

2. Political Violence

- A) Scale: targeting specific and systematic?
- B) Nature: which forms/means?
 - Form of political engagement?
 - Instrument of power?
- C) Dynamics
 - Reason and purpose?
 - Role of religion and ethnicity? Role working for occupation? Role connection to past regime?
 - By whom? What power relations and interest? Political struggle for power and control?

3. Impact Higher Education on Political Violence and Conflict

- A) Reinforces or exacerbates violence and conflict?
 - o Academic freedom present? Who controls universities?
 - o Curriculum?
 - o Promote hatred?
 - o Determine appointing and attendance? Biased selection?
- B) Potential to mitigate violence and conflict?
 - o Promote tolerant climate?
 - o Discuss dangers of sectarianism, discuss violence?
 - o Equal opportunity / access?
 - o Through academic freedom?

Appendix 2: Questionnaire in English

Higher Education, Political Violence and Conflict in post-2003 occupied Iraq

Participation in this research (i.e. completing the questionnaire) is completely voluntarily. The anonymity of respondents is fully ensured, as is the confidentiality of the gathering, processing and analyzing of the data. I highly appreciate your cooperation to shed some light on the true plight of Iraqi academics and the Iraqi higher education system.

Please feel free to elaborate as much as you can or wish on the questions, and to provide any information you deem relevant or important. Using examples to clarify your argument is encouraged.

You may answer in English or Arabic, but please make sure to number your answers in accordance with the questions they belong to. You may write in a separate word document, or insert your answers in this document. Please send the completed questionnaire both to:

hester.paanakker@student.uva.nl, and hester_luna@hotmail.com.

Alternatively, you may print it, and hand it to me in person after completion (if relevant).

Thank you for your cooperation.

1.	When did you leave Iraq and why?
2.	What is your field of study / expertise?
3.	What are the main changes in the higher education system since 2003? What are the main problems?
4.	What was the role of higher education in Iraqi society and what is it now?
5.	What are the main challenges academics face and have been facing since 2003?

6.	Please read the following statement: <i>“Academics are being targeted specifically and systematically.”</i> Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please explain what makes you believe it is specific and systematic or not.
7.	In your opinion, for what reason (1) and for what purpose (2) are academics being targeted?
8.	Are some academics more targeted than others? Please explain why (not).
9.	Do the following factors play a role in the violence against academics? (a) political conviction, beliefs or position, (b) field of work, (c) connection to past regime, (d) (being perceived as) working with or for the occupational forces, (e) religion, (f) ethnicity If yes, how and to what extent?
10.	Which means or forms of violence are used against academics?
11.	If not yet specified in the previous questions, who do you believe is behind the violence against the higher educational sector and academics? Who are the initiators and/or perpetrators?
12.	Has anything been undertaken to prosecute or punish the perpetrators of these crimes?
13.	What is academic freedom to you? Do you feel there is academic freedom in Iraq?
14.	In your opinion, who is controlling the universities? Who is truly in charge and to what extent?
15.	Does the higher education system as it is now reinforce or even exacerbate the tensions? Does it reinforce or exacerbate the violence? If yes, how and to what extent?

16.	What does all this mean for the future of higher education in Iraq?
17.	What does all this mean for the future of Iraqi society?
18.	What has to happen to improve the state of the higher education system? What has priority?
19.	Could, in your opinion, education take the lead in forcing changes upon society? If no, why not? If yes, how?
20.	What should change for you personally to make you (consider to) go back and reassume your position as an academic?

For sake of completeness, please state whether you are:

- Male
- Female

- <30 years old
- 30-40 years old
- 40-50 years old
- 50-60 years old
- > 60 years old

Many thanks for your time and kind cooperation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. If you have any additional comments or remarks, please feel free to write them down or to elaborate on the topic in any way you deem relevant or necessary.

*Yours sincerely,
Hester Luna Paanakker*

Appendix 3: Questionnaire in Arabic

استبيان عن الدراسات العليا و الصراع في العراق
كلية الدراسات العليا للعلوم التربوية
جامعة أمستردام، هولندا

الدراسات العليا، العنف السياسي و الصراع في العراق المحتل ما بعد عام 2003

إن المشاركة في هذا البحث (أي تعبئة الاستبيان) هو عمل تطوعي بحت. إن إخفاء هوية المشاركين مؤكدة تماما بالإضافة إلى خصوصية عملية جمع و تحليل المعلومات. إنني أقدر تعاونكم لإلقاء الضوء على الوضع الحقيقي للأمور الأكاديمية في العراق و نظام التعليم العالي العراقي.

الرجاء ممن يرغب بالتوضيح أكثر في الإجابة و إضافة أي معلومات قد ترونها ذات صلة أو أهمية التمتع بالحرية بذلك. يفضل استخدام الأمثلة (إن وجدت).

يمكنكم الإجابة باللغة العربية أو الانجليزية، لكن أود التأكيد على ترقيم الإجابات بما يتناسب مع الأسئلة. يكمن الإجابة على مستند منفصل (Microsoft Word)، أو إدخال إجاباتكم على هذا المستند نفسه. في جميع الحالات، الرجاء إرسال الاستبيان المعبئ إلى العنوانين التاليين:

hester.paanakker@student.uva.nl

hester_luna@hotmail.com

يمكنكم أيضا طباعة المستند و إعطائه لي باليد بعد الانتهاء.

اشكر لكم تعاونكم

- (1) متى تركتم العراق؟ لماذا؟
- (2) ما هو مجال دراستكم / تخصصكم؟
- (3) ما هي أهم التغيرات التي حصلت على نظام التعليم العالي منذ العام 2003؟ ما هي أهم المشاكل؟
- (4) ما هو دور التعليم العالي في المجتمع العراقي سابقا و حاليا؟
- (5) ما هي أهم التحديات التي تواجهها القطاع الأكاديمي منذ العام 2003؟
- (6) الرجاء قراءة العبارة التالية:

" إن القطاع الأكاديمي مستهدف استهدافاً محدد و منهجي "

هل تتفقون أم تعارضون مع المقولة السابقة؟ الرجاء شرح أسباب اعتقادكم أن الاستهداف هذا محدد و منهجي أم لا.

(7) في رأيكم، ما هو سبب و ما هو الغرض من استهداف الجوانب الأكاديمية؟

(8) هل استهداف القطاع الأكاديمي منحصر بجوانب محدد؟ لماذا / لماذا لا؟

(9) هل تلعب العوامل التالية دوراً في العنف على القطاع الأكاديمي؟

أ. المعتقدات و المواقع السياسية.

ب. مجال العمل.

ج. العلاقات بمنظمات سابقة.

د. (الاعتقاد بأن) المستهدف يعمل مع قوات الاحتلال.

هـ. الدين.

و. العرق.

إذا أجبتكم بنعم، كيف و لأي درجة؟

(10) ما هي أنواع و أشكال العنف المستخدم ضد القطاع الأكاديمي؟

(11) إذا لم تحددوا في إجاباتكم السابقة، من باعتقادكم هو المسبب للعنف ضد قطاع التعليم العالي

و الأكاديمي؟ من هم المنظمون و من هم المنفذون؟

(12) هل تم اتخاذ أي إجراء لمقاضاة أو معاقبة منفعدي هذه الجرائم؟

(13) ما هي الحرية الأكاديمية بالنسبة لكم؟ هل تؤمن بوجود الحرية الأكاديمية في العراق؟

(14) برأيكم، من هي الجهة المسيطرة على الجامعات؟ من هم المسؤولون الحقيقيون و لأي درجة هم مسئولون؟

(15) هل يقوم نظام التعليم العالي – بوضعه الحالي- بدعم أو حتى الزيادة من حدة التوتر؟ هل يدعم أو يزيد من حدة العنف؟ إذا أجبتم بنعم، كيف و لأي درجة؟

(16) ما الذي يعنيه كل هذا لمستقبل التعليم العالي في العراق؟

(17) ما الذي يعنيه كل هذا للمجتمع العراقي؟

(18) ما الذي عليه أن يحصل حتى يتحسن وضع التعليم العالي؟ ما الذي يحتل قمة سلم الأولويات؟

(19) هل بإمكان التعليم –برأيكم- إن يحصل على المركز الأول في تفعيل التغيرات في المجتمع؟ إذا أجبتم بنعم، لماذا؟ و إذا أجبتم بلا، لماذا؟

(20) ما الذي عليه أن يتغير لكم شخصيا حتى تتمكنوا من (التفكير) بالعودة و استرجاع مناصبكم كأكاديميين؟

• من أجل إكمال الاستبيان، الرجاء الإجابة على التالي:

هل أنت: ☐ ذكر ☐ أنثى

هل يتراوح عمرك ما بين: ☐ اقل من 30

☐ 30 – 40

☐ 40 – 50

☐ 50 – 60

☐ فوق 60

أنتقدم بالشكر الجزيل لإعطائي بعضاً من وقتكم. إذا كان لديكم أي أسئلة، الرجاء عدم التردد بالاتصال بي. إذا كانت لديكم أي معلومات أو تعليقات إضافية، يرجى كتابتها باستخدام أفضل وسيلة لتوضيح الصورة.

مع الشكر

هيوستن لونا باناكر