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Rebuilding knowledge: Opportunities and risks for higher education in post-conflict regions

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Rebuilding Knowledge

Opportunities and Risks for Higher Education in Post-Conflict Regions¹

Dr. Hart Nadav Feuer, Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Prof. Dr. Conrad Schetter

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1 Abstract

The transition from violence and instability to peace and prosperity is rarely linear, but rather defined more by its complexity and the alignment of often-surprising conditions. The rebuilding and reorganization of the higher education sector, in particular, is increasingly being recognized as both a driver and a consequence of this complex transition, which is marked by a sustained process of negotiation between various local factions and with external actors. In so-called 'intervention societies' where humanitarian relief and long-term development intersect, re-envisioning what types of "knowledge" to promote through higher education is very much at the heart of re-writing the social contract and investing in peace and productivity. Indeed, in development circles, the reform or reconstruction of systems of higher education is now viewed as an opportunity to achieve the long-term goals of integration, intercultural communication, and tolerance building. As an outlet for young people (many of which are demobilized soldiers) and a space for breaking down knowledge monopolies in society, universities are emblematic of the aspirations for training a post-conflict generation of civil servants, politicians and thinkers, as well as for interfacing with the outside world. Keeping the unique characteristics and timeline of each conflict in mind, this paper investigates, on the one hand, comparable trends in macro-level discourse and programming around post-conflict higher education in different countries and, on the other hand, evaluates on the very routine and practical level, the challenges faced by students, teachers, and administrators to conceive of, regulate and re-build systems of higher education and the corresponding academic social life on campuses. In this, we look at how the passive byproducts of knowledge creation in a university atmosphere, such as gaining academic reflexivity, socializing with former enemies, and reproducing societal hierarchies is intertwined with content and learning.

Keywords: post-conflict, higher education, knowledge, rebuilding, peacebuilding

2 Background

In 1988, 26 years after the military coup d'état placing General Ne Win in power and the demolition of the Rangoon University Student Union, the military regime in Myanmar hastened a program to dismantle cosmopolitan urban university campuses. In May 2012, 50 years after the original events of 1962, adviser to the President U Myint² issued an unofficial 'Open Letter on Restoring the University of Yangon to its Former Glory,'³ in which he echoed student and faculty desires to re-assemble one central university from the various institutes spread out in the outskirts of Yangon. In both of these instances, officials understood something that is now (re)gaining traction in the field of higher education development—that, far from only being a setting for formal learning, campuses are arenas of political socialization. The changing orientation in development theory is premised on the optimistic view that, in countries all over the world facing similar pressures as present-day Myanmar, this type of socialization is an important lever for tolerance and peace-building, inter-cultural communication and diplomacy, and regional and international integration (Brannelly, Lewis, & Ndaruhutse, 2011). The political nature of these 'byproducts' suggests that, within each country, the role of universities will not automatically improve as time goes on since the cessation of fighting, but rather depends more broadly on the evolution of political structures, demographics, and international embeddedness in the knowledge society. Therefore, in the rush to view universities as a promising tool for economic growth, international integration, and political socialization, it must be acknowledged that these benefits will not necessarily be unlocked unless higher education co-evolves with, and becomes embedded, in society (Earnest & Treagust, 2006, pp. xi–xii). Indeed, this idea applies not only in post-conflict societies (Baker & Brown, 2007); the 1999 Bologna Declaration suggested that, in addition to the technical goals of standardization and improving quality, the process of European higher education integration fosters

“[...] an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount.”⁴

Unsurprisingly, the lofty societal goals of the Bologna Declaration generally align with long-term development ideals in general but they also seem to apply more critically to conflict settings, where stability and peace are the main priorities. While high-profile political negotiations can subside hostilities in the short-term, conflict mitigation and resolution requires lasting engagement in many societal arenas. Development co-operation and academia are grasping for new measures to identify and engage with these various arenas. The idea that higher education not only trains the labor force but also contributes to building a middle class, improving social engagement, and creating space for diplomacy and political debate is clearly an appealing impetus for supporting higher education development (Brannelly et al., 2011). Trends in overseas development aid (ODA) to various sectors of education have roughly tended to mirror the idea that, while basic and secondary education are urgent humanitarian concerns, sustained investment in tertiary education helps to rebuild political capacity and the economy. Based on our analysis of aid flows,⁵ 72% of conflict countries⁶ receive large boosts in aid to primary education during and after conflicts, while higher education tends to

² U Myint is also the Chief of the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) of the Myanmar Development Resource Institute (MDRI) and former lecturer in Economics at the Institute of Education and Institute of Economics in Myanmar.

³ This open letter, dated 19 May, 2012 was released over many sources and published subsequently on the internet. It was not officially sanctioned by the office of the President of Myanmar.

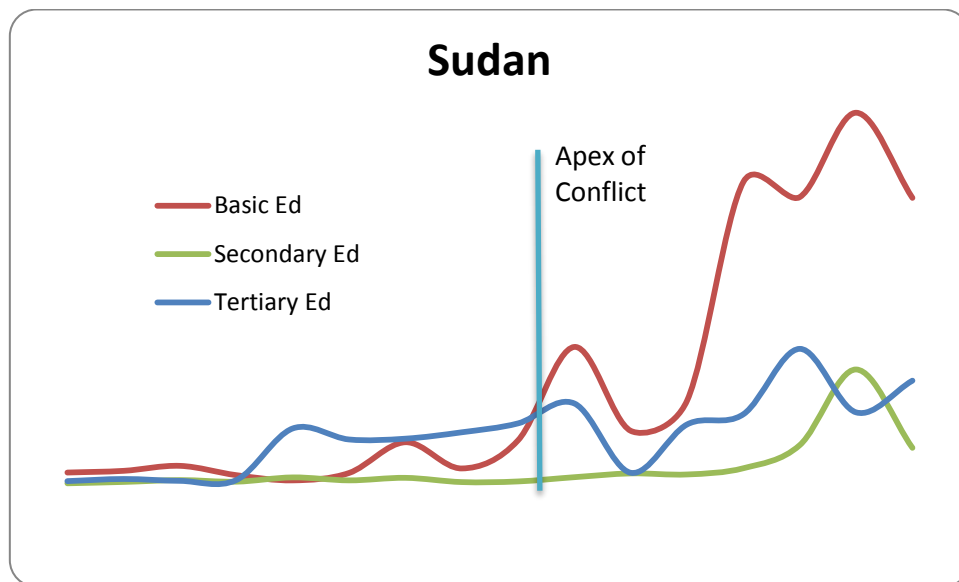
⁴ From the text of the Bologna Declaration, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/bologna_en.htm

⁵ Data sources: OECD.Stat and World Development Indicators

⁶ 'Conflict countries' corresponds to the World Bank's index of fragile situations, published annually

receive delayed but more sustained support (see, for example, the case of the Sudan in Figure 1). While this is particularly true of the aid-giving trends for countries with education-oriented aid policies, such as France and Germany, many donors to post-conflict countries continue to prioritize only primary and secondary education, despite research suggesting that important passive benefits of higher education highlighted in the Bologna Declaration, such as peace-building and political stability, are reinforced through tertiary education.

Figure 1. Overseas development aid (ODA) during a violent conflict



Source: Compiled from OECD.Stat

Indeed, in so-called 'intervention societies' where humanitarian relief and long-term development interests intersect (Daxner, 2010a, p. 90), re-envisioning what types of 'knowledge' to promote through higher education is very much at the heart of re-writing the social contract and investing in peace and productivity (Beerkens, 2004a; Hornidge, 2012). As an outlet for young people (many of which are demobilized soldiers) and a space for breaking down knowledge monopolies in society, universities are emblematic of the aspirations for training a post-conflict generation of civil servants, politicians and thinkers, as well as for interfacing with the outside world (Daxner, 2010b, p. 90; Smith, 2010a). Because the humanitarian discourse increasingly encourages that higher education should be part of a comprehensive early-stage reconstruction (as suggested in Kirk, 2007; Smith, 2010b), the interest in higher education as a peace-building tool has grown among multilateral institutions, particularly UNESCO and the World Bank (UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2005).

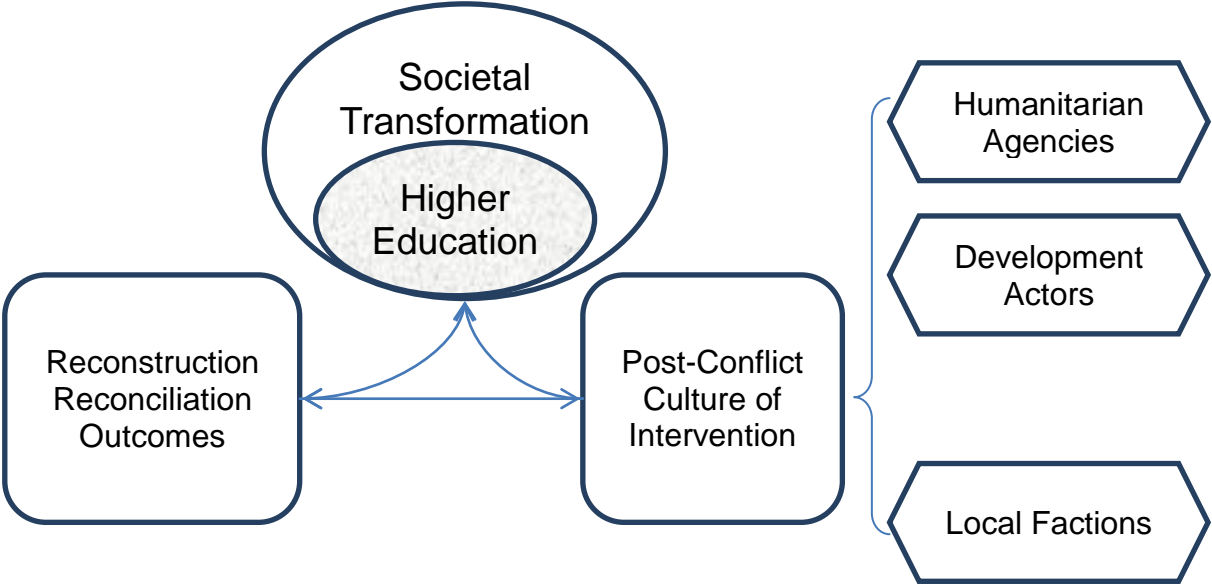
If interest has been building around the idea that higher education can play a meaningful role in conflict resolution, one would expect to find ample examples in practice and theory concerning mechanisms for taking advantage of this. Unfortunately, knowledge situating higher education in post-conflict redevelopment is still in its infancy and is often overshadowed by urgent humanitarian concerns and the discursive dominance of basic education in multilateral humanitarian platforms (Smith, 2010a). Paradoxically, this bias exists despite the fact that, between 1995 and 2010, aggregate official development aid to higher education has grown by 450%, which is roughly in line with increases to ODA for basic education and secondary education. The progress that has been made in identifying ways to leverage higher education for peace-building has mostly been by transition countries facing the task of education reform on their own (a few notable examples can be found in the edited volume by Earnest & Treagust, 2006). In other words, it has been mostly left up

to recipient-countries to develop ways of utilizing aid to higher education to support conflict resolution.

2.1 Conceptualizing Higher Education in Conflict Scenarios

The research gap noted above has compelled us to conceptualize higher education within a broader nexus of transformation and knowledge creation populated by both internal and external actors. This framework is outlined in Figure 2, in which implicit is the idea that the higher education sector is a reflection—and often a driver—of many political, military, economic, and social changes underway in society as a whole. However, this broad conceptualization left us with a dilemma: how can we access and study the intangible and passive societal-level impacts of higher education? Our approach was to take stock of these experiences by looking at socialization in university spaces, such as campuses and student cultural institutions, as well as evaluating the projection of university administration on social hierarchy and student ambition in a selection of countries with different types of conflicts and timelines. Although it is not apparent whether this novel window of observation on post-conflict transition is appropriate, a number of academics have suggested that the social and bureaucratic realms of universities are indicative of processes we wish to investigate, such as national processes of reconciliation, identity building, social and civic development, as well as political change and differentiation (Agasisti, 2009; Barnett, 2007; Davies, 2004; Hopkins, 2011; Temple, 2008; Thornton & Jaeger, 2008).

Figure 2. Relationship of Higher Education to Post-Conflict Development



Source: Authors

3 Situating Higher Education in Conflict

The reform or re-establishment of higher education is, in contrary to literacy or basic education, "linked more directly to the emergence of a broad development vision for the society", which is often disputed or missing in post-conflict political voids (World Bank 2005; Collins & Rhoads 2010). In general, the 'political dimension' of rebuilding the system of tertiary education is turning out to be a salient topic in discussions of peace-building, reconstruction, and economic growth (Kohoutek, 2013). Common issues include the development of curriculum, the selection of language of instruction, accessibility of tertiary education, extra-curricular activities, reconfiguring propaganda and censorship, and inclusion of peripheral sects/ethnicities (Tomlinson & Benefield, 2005). These are among the most debated topics in recent symposia on the subject in Europe. In a 1997 workshop hosted by UNESCO, participants outlined the nature of different conflict situations (their causes, the nature of the conflict, its duration, and resolution) and matched these with the role of education at various phases before, during, and after such conflicts (in prevention, preparedness, coping mechanisms, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction) (Tawil, 1997). Certain periods, for example, are associated with more corruption (Plikšnys, Kopnicka, Hrynevych, & Palicarsky, 2009) or an intensification of repression and propaganda (Nicolai, 2009; World Bank, 2005, p. 21), while others are associated with efforts for peace-building and economic revitalization (Aburabia-Queder, 2011; Metro, 2013; World Bank, 2000). In short, both the academic and multilateral discourses on higher education are sensitive to the impacts on—and from—higher education at various periods and in certain types of conflict. As yet, however, there is little convergence on central or core issues that could be addressed with certain types of intervention. From our survey of the literature, we suggest that political liabilities inherent to rebuilding higher education often stem from three widely relevant origins:

1. Youth, teachers and professors are often on the front lines of revolutions; therefore, post-conflict demobilization of combatants often depends upon re-absorbing them back into the workplace and social milieu of the academy (Buckland, 2006);
2. As a space in which knowledge and political discourses are generated and challenged, the system of higher education becomes a contested arena for new regimes (Daxner, 2010b);
3. Reproducing ethnic and class struggles in the rebuilding of higher education creates a risk of renewed violence or acrimony (or vice versa) (UNESCO, 2010).

These three aspects of higher education reconstruction not only represent a set of cross-cutting issues linking conflict with social and political change, they also suggest avenues of intervention that can be studied and framed for policy.

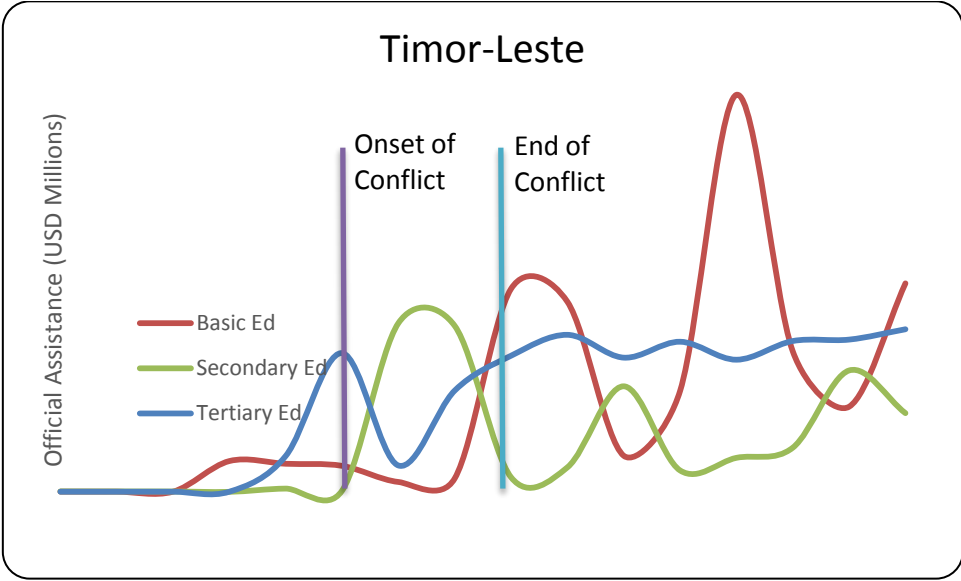
3.1 Intervention Societies

The priority setting required to establish what types of knowledge and socialization to promote through higher education is contested not only by local factions but by passive processes of globalization as well as international players in development and higher education cooperation (Beerens, 2004b; Daxner, 2010b, p. 95; Hornidge, 2012; Schetter & Mielke, 2008; Zürcher, 2010). Together, these actors engender a 'culture of intervention' (Daxner, Free, Bonacker, & Zürcher, 2010; Schetter, 2010) that is reflective of the passive influences of globalization and the active participation of external interveners and domestic stakeholders (Bonacker, 2010). Nationally, models for knowledge creation and academic socialization are typically subordinated to pre-existing hierarchies, institutional culture, political agendas, economic change, and gender norms (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Waljee, 2008). Internationally, external interveners' institutionalized post-conflict agendas dictate not only the funding levels but also the types of development assistance offered to post-conflict countries (Bonacker, 2010). In post-conflict scenarios, international actors, such as humanitarian or

aid agencies, are often in a strong position to influence the trajectory of education reconstruction, so their allocation decisions matter a great deal. Furthermore, with the development discourse on higher education in transition, it is an important juncture for investigating the unique situation of conflict countries.

Spurred by positive coverage about aid for higher education in various high-profile reports since 2000 (see UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2005, 2009, 2012), the share of aid for tertiary education has continually increased, but the picture is more complicated for conflict countries. As recently as 2010, tertiary education received 20% more funding from OECD-DAC sources than basic and secondary education; the picture for the 30+ countries on World Bank's list of fragile situations,⁷ however, is less straightforward. Based on our analysis, compared to tertiary education, aid to basic education is more volatile and tends to be associated with short-term humanitarian response during and after conflicts (72% of fragile situations). Donor-support for tertiary education, if it changes during conflict, tends to grow slowly but steadily (42% of cases). Examples from Timor-Leste and Angola (see Figures 3 and 4) illustrate this phenomenon. These trends in education aid suggest that donors share a fairly unified perspective on assistance around violent conflicts. One explanation is that donors do not view tertiary education as a sector that can simply and swiftly be reconstructed in an interventionist humanitarian manner (i.e. rebuilding schools, buying uniforms, and training teachers), but requires long-term, cooperative and more comprehensive engagement (Brannelly et al., 2011).

Figure 3. Overseas development aid during and after a violent conflict

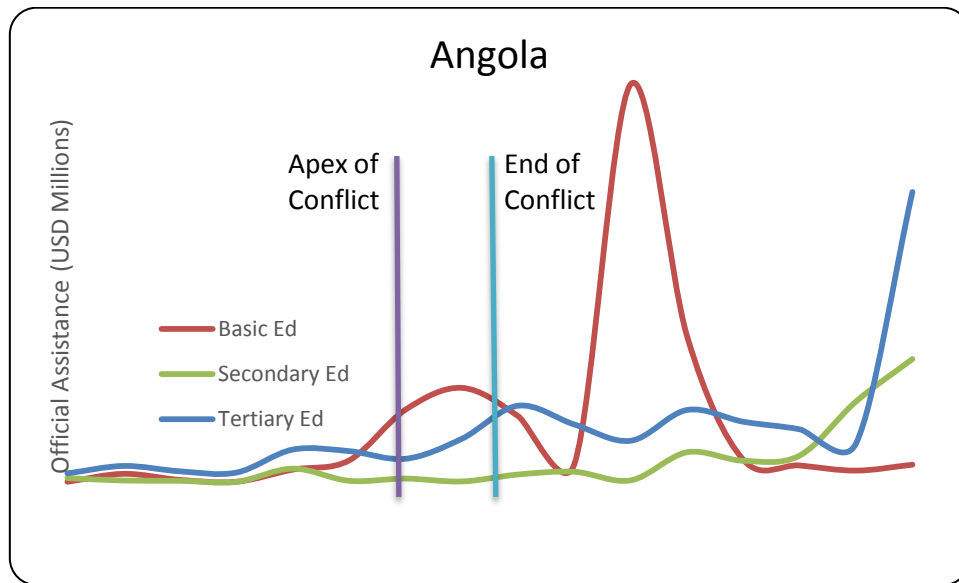


Source: Compiled from OECD.Stat

This is particularly the case as higher education institutions and pedagogy are historical and cultural products (with their own legacies) and cannot be simply, or directly, (re)built. Not only is there a long-term narrative to consider (such as colonialism or ethnic and class divisions), but also more contemporary experiences, such as campus destruction or the flight of human capital for economic and political reasons (Smith, 2010a; Tawil, 1997; Un, 2012). Immediately after conflict, the post-secondary education sector plays an important role in absorbing youth and young adults who might otherwise become sources of recurring violence (Buckland, 2006; World Bank, 2000). Bringing a divided society back into universities, however, also sets the stage for further challenges such as managing ethnic and class struggles on campus and in university administration.

⁷ See the World Bank's section on Fragile and Conflict Situations, available online: <http://go.worldbank.org/BNFOS8V3S0>

Figure 4. Overseas development aid during and after violent conflict



Source: Compiled from OECD.Stat

3.2 Conflicts Reflected on Campus and in University Administration

Viewing post-conflict societies through the lens of university campuses and the concomitant administration procedures and strategies that regulate access and social space is an indirect way of observing national contestation over political, social, and economic change (Brannelly et al., 2011). From the literature on international education, approaches such as Temple's (2008) "spaces of higher education" or Hopkins' (2011) "critical geographies of the university campus" have hinted at the role of campus environment for academic and civic socialization (see also Barnett, 2007; Thornton & Jaeger, 2008), while others have looked at the intersection of students and university administration for uncovering processes of change (see Agasisti, 2009; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Here, not only the physical environment (buildings, layout, communal spaces, etc.) and social environment (sports, extracurricular activities, competitive spirit, etc.) but also the institutions (financial access, dress codes, religious and cultural content, etc.) reflect issues in society at large. However, university spaces also possess agency, often being pioneers of social change, innovation, and political debate. In short, the higher education sector is an intellectual and social template created by and, in turn, influencing post-conflict rebuilding and political change.

Most of the literature about the impacts of campus and university administration, however, originates in rich countries and the focus tends to be on optimizing conditions for learning rather than building tolerance and peace. Temple (2008), for example, argues that changes to campus design and classroom environment should primarily facilitate improvement in the atmosphere for gaining knowledge. However, Temple also suggests that improvements in students' learning are often indirectly mediated through things such as the building of social capital, engendering positive attitudes and solidarity, and increasing the sense of security. However, what if these social outcomes were viewed as ends in themselves (e.g. peace-building), and not only as means for influencing learning? Brannelly et al. (2011) maintain that higher education is more than just learning and preparation for participation in the labor force, it is also about building a middle class, promoting social engagement, and improving governance. While they find that investment in higher education is associated with better governance (after a 20-year lag), they admit that the mechanism for leveraging the passive benefits of higher education is unclear. In her book, Boys (2010) illuminates this issue further, arguing that the main questions of learning and social/campus interaction are

typically over-simplified and that it is important to consider the combination of institutional practices and structural dynamics that contribute to the potential of higher education.

The need to connect the campus/social experience with broader socio-political issues at the country drove us to investigate higher education administration, a mediating factor between national politics, political culture and student socialization. This is apparent in research such as that of Agasisti (2009), which suggests that a seemingly straightforward decision, such as allocating university funding, can have much broader impacts on the potential for regional integration and immigration patterns. Organizational decisions, such whether university governance takes on a financial/corporatist model or an ethical/academician-oriented model not only impact on the content of teaching, but also on the institutional environment in which students are socialized in (Trakman, 2008). In their account of the neoliberalization of higher education, Baker and Brown (2007) argue that certain models of privatization can compel students toward service sector work and away from systemic political education. As Barnett (2007) suggests, when studying the impacts and potential of higher education, it is important to understand the student as a social being, the teacher as a moderator and negotiator, the campus as a socialization experience, and national politics as the socio-political backdrop. It is with these questions in mind, that we analyze the situation of higher education in a sample of conflict regions outlined below.

3.3 Case Studies and Research Question

By stretching the window of observation from present-day conflict resolution activities back 20 to 40 years (see Table 1 for country list and timeline), we investigate how higher education co-evolves with the national social and political spheres. The countries we observed, Libya, Tajikistan, Burma/Myanmar and Cambodia, represent a cross-section of post-conflict scenarios for which research on higher education has been in short supply (UNESCO, 2010, p. 96). With these cases as a background, we ask the following overarching research question:

“In post-conflict periods, how do higher education administration and campus culture co-evolve with the national and externally-influenced project of reconstruction, reconciliation and development?”

Here, a subsidiary question asks how the passage of time affects these processes? This is relevant for two main reasons: (1) the expectations and discourses about post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation in general, and higher education in particular, differed in the past, which laid down distinctive long-term precedents (Daxner, 2010b, p. 79); and (2) as countries mature and conflicts retreat or change form, progress—or at least change—in higher education is expected (Daxner et al., 2010). In short, we aim to look at different types of conflicts and different phases of reconstruction.

Table 1: Country Case Studies of Proposed Project

Type of Conflict	Country Case	Time period Geographical area	Ideology Point of Departure
Autogenocide, Forced ruralization	Cambodia	1975-1979 Khmer Rouge Southeast Asia	Establishing a Maoist agrarian state; Destruction of the 'intellectual bourgeoisie'
Civil war	Tajikistan	1991-1996 Central Asia	Religio-ethnic motivated: contest of Islamic and secular-nationalistic forces in decline of the Soviet Union

Rebellion, Democratic movement	Libya	2011 Arab Spring North Africa	Protests against an authoritarian regime
Military regime, Ethnic conflicts	Burma/ Myanmar	1962-2008 Southeast Asia	Transition from Socialist military dictatorship to democracy

Cambodia, the case with the longest post-conflict recovery period, is still rebuilding with the help of foreign aid after extensive destruction of educational infrastructure, human capacity, and the culture of learning; the runaway privatization of the higher education landscape has been a significant characteristic of change, creating fragmentation in campus and learning atmosphere while creating challenges for decentralized university administration (Duggan, 1997; Rany, Zain, & Jamil, 2012). Tajikistan, after the fall of the Soviet Union, underwent a civil war that illuminated ideological divisions regarding the role, access, and content of public institutions; the hurdles of ethnic/regional and class stratification are increasingly being faced in a university sector marked by not only soviet-era but also international management models (Johnson, 2004; Niyozov, 2011; Waljee, 2010). In Libya, the university system was employed for decades as a tool for propaganda as well as social and economic control; after the revolution, academics are being incrementally vetted and re-socialized as a culture of self-censorship is lifted and academic freedom takes root. In Myanmar, a respected higher education system degraded after the 1960s due to repression, military focus, and lack of funding, but was more purposefully dismantled from the late 1908s to prevent protests (Cheesman, 2003); since its opening up, foreign aid, regional government and university partnerships have spurred life back into the system (Stone, 2012).

4 Addressing Conflict with Higher Education

This paper began with a small vignette about Myanmar, which illustrated the changing understanding and appreciation about how higher education co-evolves with conflict. In this next section, we draw from statistics and case studies in conflict countries to begin sketching a picture of the interaction between higher education and ongoing processes of conflict resolution and nation-building. Given the diversity and complexity inherent to violent conflicts and the varied conditions in each case, our goal here is not to propose definitive policies that leverage higher education for peace-building, but to outline common mechanisms that are likely to play a role for better or worse, and which have been overlooked in past research and development interventions.

4.1 Methodological Reflections

Among the reasons that the peace-building-potential of higher education has remained under-researched is that doing so requires interdisciplinarity, creative methods, and work in conflict areas. A minimal analysis of curriculum conducted from a safe distance, without considering students' identities (as demobilized fighters, family of victims, etc.) or understanding the political system and social environment under which they learn and live, will tend to miss critical elements of complex conflicts. This study, an introduction to new perspectives for evaluating the passive benefits of higher education, explores new terrain in this respect. Specifically, we bring in the following sources and types of information:

- insights from researchers and students from each country who have conducted fieldwork that is both directly and indirectly related to higher education
- evaluations from conferences and policy dialogues that discuss higher education (reform)
- expert interviews with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in higher education and lifelong learning
- review of a broad range of academic literature and media accounts

Because of our orientation on the implicit content and experience of higher education, we have not focused overly on policy documents and the content of explicitly peace-building-oriented programs (such as Peace Studies degree programs). Moreover, as this research was only incidentally conducted as part of a pilot project, we are only touching the surface of many of these issues.

4.2 Cosmopolitan Atmosphere: Learning Environments for Building Tolerance

In many respects, universities represent a microcosm of society. Unlike primary and secondary schools, which typically attract students from nearby regions, institutes of higher education can draw upon students of various backgrounds both nationally and internationally. In this, they can be either an opportunity to encounter and learn to respect cultural diversity and class difference or to reproduce intolerance and sharpen inequalities (UNESCO, 2010). The former is often touted optimistically in higher education development reports:

“The norms, values, attitudes and ethics that tertiary institutions impart to students are the foundation of the social capital necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and cohesive cultures—the very bedrock of good governance and democratic political systems.” (World Bank, 2002, p. 5)

Since values and norms are not imparted through the experience of learning and studying in a direct manner, this leaves only two ways in which this social capital could be created: curriculum and

campus life/interactions. Curriculum is, perhaps surprisingly, less viable than the alternatives because the thematic content of students' learning is often tailored to specific subjects (i.e. specific faculties, departments and schools of thought) that do not lend themselves to peace-building. Without specific courses addressing the relevant issues (in history, ethics, philosophy, etc.) or 'peace education' (which we have not found in any of our case study countries), curriculum remains a somewhat awkward avenue for promoting tolerance (Tomlinson & Benefield, 2005). This leaves campus life and student social interactions.

Although "among the many methods employed to foster student learning and development, the use of the physical environment is perhaps the least understood and the most neglected" (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 30) by academics, politicians appear to be acutely aware of the various potentials of university campuses. The story that began this paper illustrates how subsequent regimes in Myanmar wished to dismantle and re-assemble Rangoon/Yangon University in response to various threatening and later desirable aspects of campus political and academic socialization. In Soviet-era Tajikistan, education and campus culture were strictly controlled and used as a tool for propaganda as well as the education of cadre elites (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006). The civil war following the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in 20% of the universities being destroyed; many continue to be left in disrepair due to lack of funds as well as passive regional disenfranchisement (Baschieri & Falkingham, 2009), while other university campuses (like the Tajik State National University) enjoy the well-maintained grounds of the former communist training academy (while nevertheless suffering an immense loss of qualified teaching staff to outside Tajikistan). In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge almost entirely eradicated academic learning and persecuted intellectuals because they compromised their utopian vision (Rany et al., 2012; Un, 2012). In Libya, the regime under Gaddafi raided the Al Fateh University (now University of Tripoli) in 1976 and 1984, executing activist students and burning books representing foreign influence (Hackensberger, 2012; Linvill, 2012). A few universities were damaged or looted during the uprising against Gaddafi but given the strength of the economy, the primary challenge in Libya is to refashion a liberal campus culture and basis of learning not tainted by Gaddafi's ideological and political orthodoxy (Barnard, 2011).

In a place like Libya, where the main challenges are social and professional rather than financial, re-inventing the campus as a haven for reconciliation has been one of the fundamental goals. The new dean of Tripoli University is working to re-integrate rather than punish professors that were formerly close to the regime, and to make the campus a cosmopolitan place (Hackensberger, 2012). In an article written by higher education researchers (Barakat & Milton, 2011) for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, they make a strong case for investing in university spaces to aid in conflict resolution:

"Divisions between supporters of the former regime and revolutionaries require universities to proactively promote campus-level reconciliation. [...] Student unions and similar groups offer a unique space in which young people have the potential to learn skills vital to citizenship, including democratic governance, campaigning, networking, debating, and dialogue. [...] Across many countries, universities are places where many students meet 'the other' for the first time and Libya is no exception. In diverse and divided societies recovering from conflict, interaction with people from different ethnic, racial, religious, or ideological backgrounds can help to foster new inclusive identities and ideas that transcend communal divisions."

Even in cases where the official political context is not conducive to reconciliation, the campus can be a more progressive location. In an interview with a Rohingya student from Yangon University (14 February 2013), she admitted to falsely representing herself as Buddhist to university administrators in order to gain university access, but she found the campus and students very welcoming to her. Often, however, campus atmosphere reflects at least some of the divisive social issues present in the country as a whole. In post-civil war Tajikistan, an unspoken ethnic tolerance has quietly emerged in universities but political socialization and solidarity-building extra-curricular activities (such as

debate, competitive sports) have only taken off in the private and elite universities, indicating that social class remains a point of cleavage. The privatization or the 'neoliberalization' of higher education can present additional challenges to achieving liberal university spaces (Barakat & Milton, 2011). In Cambodia, in the absence of strong national support for rebuilding higher education, private universities have cropped up with a wide diversity (or fragmentation) in campus styles and goals for political socialization. Besides falling outside of the domain of any national reconciliation initiatives, private universities are typically uninterested in contributing to broader social goals unless they stand to benefit (Baker & Brown, 2007).

Universities themselves are not unaware of the benefits that a thriving campus atmosphere can bestow, but there are a number of hurdles that must be overcome. First, most universities we have looked at (except in Libya) do not appear to have adequate resources to overhaul their campuses. With some research, limited funding could be optimized to achieve certain objectives: for example, supporting extra-curricular activities and hosting sports matches, all of which create within-group solidarity. However, this leads to the second hurdle: universities are not necessarily aware of best ways to improve campuses. At a higher education event in Myanmar, a university official related to one of the author's that his model of campus architecture would be Oxford and Cambridge (9 February 2013). And indeed, it has been documented that grounds maintenance facilitates association and generates pride (Temple, 2008), and massive Doric columns can impress, but these interventions must be calculated against the alternatives. Darley (1991) writes of the 1960s renovations of various British universities that unnecessary campus features represented "a preoccupation with imagery [which] led to architectural indulgence". And with communication and information technologies already transforming ideas of space and place, reinvention rather than reproduction of traditional spaces such as libraries, classrooms and canteens is gaining in importance (Hornidge & Kurfürst, 2011). Indeed, because many top-performing universities were founded upon elitism or other socio-cultural cleavages, it seems more likely that novel models are needed to encourage the belonging and egalitarian socialization that supports peace-building (Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor, & Trevitt, 2000).

The third hurdle faced by universities is to fashion a social atmosphere that does not reproduce harmful divisions and prejudices in society. Indeed, as we will illuminate more in the next section, power relations and hierarchies in society (and particularly the public sector) are often projected onto universities. Along with other ethnic and/or class divisions, the result can, at worst, be further disenfranchisement of certain groups (often those with which conflicts had previously occurred) or, at best, lead to tolerance without respect and a lack of progress in inter-group relations. As Pike and Kuh (2006) note, living and studying together may not be enough as "interactions among diverse groups seem to depend on the nature and quality of the interactions, rather than on their quantity". If various institutions, clubs or canteens are not open and accessible to all, whether for social or financial reasons, it can exacerbate existing tensions. In Cambodia and Myanmar, for example, canteens are affordable and popular among all groups, while in Tajikistan socio-economic conditions sometimes limit interaction, as does capability to speak Russian. Very often, however, the ethnic, ideological, religious or class make-up of campuses are already decided by the time students arrive due to admission procedures, the availability of financial aid, and trends in recruitment to various (types of) institutes. This issue we take up next.

4.3 Administering Universities: Knowledge and Political Space

Whether higher education is limited to elites or is aiming for mass participation, decisions are routinely made about who can join, under which conditions, and to which institutes. As a space in which knowledge and political discourses are generated and challenged, the system of higher education becomes a contested arena—a space in which regimes can express their ideologies and development ideals (Daxner, 2010b). In Soviet-era Tajikistan, for example, "the educational system

was rigidly politicized and bureaucratized, which led to a stifling of diversity, competition and creativity" (Niyozov & Bahry, 2006, p. 217). The power, hierarchy and political ideology of the state infused every aspect of the administration and experience of higher education. Similar characterizations can be made of almost all autocratic regimes, such as that of Gaddafi-era Libya (Linville, 2012) and post-1960s Myanmar (Cheesman, 2003). Following conflicts, a more even dual hierarchy often emerges: lecturers, professors, and students form an academic hierarchy while support staff, administrators, deans, and rectors form an administrative hierarchy. In practice, the autonomy of the academic hierarchy depends on allowances from the administrative hierarchy, which, for public institutions, depends on the political situation. The barriers to change facing higher education administration at the institutional level are well-documented elsewhere (see Kezar & Eckel, 2002) so this section will focus primarily on unique issues that post-conflict societies face.

The challenges that emerge during attempts to rebuild or reform higher education depend on the extent to which there exists a political willingness to use universities as a tool for conflict management or not. Usually, education policy aims to at least sidestep issues that could lead to a relapse of war, and occasionally policy explicitly aims to leverage higher education to create harmony, promote mutual cooperation and support integration. In post-civil war Tajikistan, on the one hand, an unspoken ethnic tolerance has quietly emerged in universities, which prevents ethnic tensions from openly flaring up. On the other hand, societal divisions become apparent in the parallel systems afforded to the higher-class, which provide privileged rates of acceptance and lower academic expectations. Scholarships, or 'budgeted departments', provide access to talented students and prevent overt elite domination. While students from some regions are pushed toward certain (less respectable) institutes, the situation is stable, if not optimal. Myanmar can also be characterized similarly, except that ongoing conflicts with minority groups implicitly lead to discrimination in university access (although not to on-campus discrimination).

While higher education can indeed be shaped to fulfil the goal of 'political socialization' in heterogeneous societies (Shochat, 1998), conflict-beset societies such as those we have studied are not often in the position to make good on such ideals. In a conference presentation, the vice president of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Thein Myint (2012), illustrated this in a somewhat contradictory list of goals of the "cultural and ethical mission" of higher education:

"[...] to preserve and assert cultural identity; promote the propagation and creation of cultural values; protect and encourage cultural diversity; participate actively in the development of intercultural understanding & harmony & mutual enrichment of cultures."

Individually, each of these aspirations is laudable but when one envisions the current political and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, it seems questionable whether propagating cultural values can really align with the goal of protecting cultural diversity. Perhaps as a result, explicit initiatives for inter-ethnic exchange between ethnicities are conducted outside Myanmar, such as in Thailand (Metro, 2013).

In Cambodia and Libya, in contrast, explicit policies are in place to privilege (or compensate) certain groups that were involved in previous violence. We have already mentioned the reconciliation policy of the newly-established University of Tripoli, which aims to re-integrate professors of the previous regime as well as bring together former rebel and government fighters. While it is yet to be seen if this will be carried out in an inclusive way and whether the initiative will be as warmly embraced in other universities, this suggests that the political and social willingness exists. In Cambodia, the government (and various partners) have employed higher education as a means to compensate areas that were until recently still controlled by Khmer Rouge guerillas. One such project is the Cambodian and Thai sponsored project to develop Meanchey University, which is targeted to the children of demobilized Khmer Rouge soldiers from Banteay Meanchey province. It was enthusiastically inaugurated in 2008 by the Prime Minister. The bad news is that, being so remote, bringing in quality students, faculty, and financial support remains a challenge. One casualty

of this situation is the campus, which remains desolate and unwelcome for social encounters; another problem is that, due to poor reputation, students rarely come from other regions, which prevents contact. Figure 5 provides an idea of the state of the campus and emptiness of the library.

Figure 5. Campus and Library of Meanchey University, Cambodia



Source: Authors

One dilemma of Meanchey University is that the government began with a static point of reference, namely providing an opportunity for children of former guerillas, and did not adequately consider that the university also had to be competitive and desirable. In her book, *Boys* (2010) argues that simplistic objectives such as enhancing 'participation'—and then driving architectural and institutional changes from this—can, and often is, misleading or flawed. Without comprehensive planning and financing, new organizational initiatives such as this may fail or backfire (Agasisti, 2009).

In contrast to Cambodia, Myanmar is in the process of decommissioning isolated campuses and consolidating them back into the cosmopolitan city center of Yangon. In his 'Open Letter' (of May 2012), adviser to the President U Myint wrote,

“[...] in conversations with faculty members and students of various institutes of higher learning spread out all over the countryside in the suburbs of Yangon, the main message I have got from them is: 'Our biggest and enduring wish is to return to the main university campus in Yangon.'”

The military regime of Myanmar had dismantled the university to prevent student mingling and solidarity. Cambodia, in good faith, may have accomplished the same goal by placing a university on the doorstep of a former Khmer Rouge stronghold. Although studies and student life continue in satellite campuses around Yangon (see Figure 6), officials are aware that these desolate places are sub-optimal for academic socialization and knowledge creation and actively moving to correct this.

Figure 6. A university graduation ceremony on the outskirts of Yangon



Source: Authors

4.4 Academic Socialization: Developing Reflexivity

Higher education in post-conflict areas can play a critical role not only in re-integrating and channelling former combatants into productive roles but also in defusing enmity and creating tolerance and respect through learning and awareness. Young people and academic staff are often participants in revolutions and insurrection (BouJaoude & Ghaith, 2006, p. 195); higher education can be an advantageous post-conflict outlet for re-absorbing them back into a liberal social milieu or workplace (Buckland, 2006). However, as we discussed in Section 3.2, and despite the optimism of the World Bank (2002), higher education does not automatically impart good values, attitudes and norms to students. Indeed, as Davies (2004) has described, education is a multi-faceted process that can just as easily regress to nationalistic and exclusionary content as lead to civic regeneration that confronts root causes of violence and inequality in society. The negative outcome of socialization is more common than one might expect, as it is tempting to yearn for the imagined stability of the past. War can easily come to be viewed simply as an interruption in the development of education without critically acknowledging that education itself is

“[...] an arena of conflicting values and expectations in society. Consequently, opportunities to learn critical lessons which may be essential for reconstruction tend to be easily squandered in favour of a return to ‘normality’.” (Wright, 1997, p. 17)

Nostalgia for specific elements of the Soviet system is rife in post-Soviet Tajikistan and the mythology of Myanmar's storied University of Yangon is as present in the President's adviser's open letter (described above) as it is in Aung San Suu Kyi's rhetorical speeches:

“I have often thought that the saddest thing about Burma over the last few decades has been the lack of campus life for our university students. Campus life means a life in which young people can create their own world – or make the world their own. They

have the freedom and the facilities to do so. [...] I would like to see university life restored to Burma in all its glory.” (Aung San Suu Kyi, 2012)

With this, we are not suggesting that politicians in Myanmar uncritically wish for a return to the past but that it can be easy to absolve higher education from any direct or indirect role in upheaval and violence. Rather, we argue along with Davies (2004) that it is necessary to establish a 'new normality' that not only sidesteps problems from the past but also actively pre-empts renewed aggression and inequality.

For this reason, we focus on the potential for higher education to impart an academic socialization, defined as gaining critical reflexivity (in the sociological sense) or at least gaining the ability to distance oneself from the situation in one's family and society so as to be in a better position for self-aware reflection. This is in contrast to the normative focus of many national programs, which aim at instilling specific values and norms that, ultimately, may only serve certain groups' interests. Achieving reflexivity involves what we discussed in Section 3.2, namely the establishment of a tolerant, open-minded and egalitarian campus social community. Perhaps more difficult, however, is challenging—not reminiscing—about the past. This has proven difficult for many countries, where either history is avoided as much as possible (Myanmar, Cambodia) or remains relatively unchallenged (Tajikistan). As early as it is, the University of Tripoli has already committed to composing a proper Libyan history after decades of consuming nationalistic propaganda (Hackensberger, 2012). In contrast, Metro's (2013) work on shared historical narratives (which had to be conducted in Thailand) suggests that a critical review of the past is still some time off in Myanmar. The situation only recently improved in Cambodia, where it took until 2008 (almost 30 years after the Khmer Rouge were deposed) for the first textbook covering that period to be approved by the government and printed. It even took until 2009 for the first English-language history book (David Chandler's *A History of Cambodia*) to be approved and translated into Khmer. Although ultimately permitted by the government, none of these efforts were spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. Instead, the translation was carried out independently by a foreign research organization, the Center for Khmer Studies, while the textbook was produced by a national NGO, the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

Confronting and reflecting on the past is admittedly a challenging task after a conflict, as there are still open wounds, sensitivities, and there are likely still perpetrators and victims co-existing. Indeed, post-conflict governments are commonly made up of coalitions of former enemies, which makes revisiting the past a political rather than a technical endeavor. It perhaps for this reason that this activity is more suited to academia, as any composition of history is slow, subject to extensive review and debate, and cognizant of the line between inconvenient subjects and potentially destabilizing subjects. Indeed, the goal of historiography is not to seek out evidence for incrimination or vindicate one party—but to learn from the past, potentially in order to avoid violence in the future.

5 Conclusion: Learning from and for Spaces of Learning

The pilot project upon which this study was based aimed, on the one hand, to investigate the trends in macro-level discourse and programming around post-conflict higher education and, on the other hand, to evaluate (on the very routine and practical level) the challenges faced by students, teachers, and administrators to conceive of, and re-build systems of higher education and the corresponding academic social life. Our point of departure was that the higher education sector is not only a worthy object of study for gaining insight on knowledge creation, national identity formation and peace-building in its own right, but also as a window on how societies envision a (peaceful) future and their own development. To this end, we studied trends in four countries: Libya, Tajikistan, Myanmar and Cambodia—each with not only a different nature to their conflict, but also a different timeline. This enabled us not only to review a more representative sample of conflict types but also to study the effect of the passage of time on higher education development.

All of the countries we analyzed can be described as 'intervention societies', which face the task of re-envisioning higher education in a nexus of national and international pressure, expertise and resources. All of the countries (except Libya) receive development aid, which is the most common form of intervention, although expert assistance, university partnerships, and student and teacher exchange are also commonly part of the package. The trend, following patterns of development aid, is that support to tertiary education (as opposed to primary or secondary) is often more consistent and reliable, representing a cooperation rather than a short-term humanitarian intervention. One reason is that, although these are rarely made explicit, the tertiary education sector has the potential to deliver various passive benefits (beyond improving the labor force) that can be leveraged for peace-building. In conflict countries, these benefits are not only a means to achieving better learning outcomes (the typical discourse in developed nations) but are the ends in themselves. In the latter half of this study, we make an initial exploration of the potential of these various benefits, asking the questions: what hinders them and what might unlock them?

Based on a review of the literature, both topics of burning interest and a consideration of research gaps led us to analyze three areas in which peace-building and higher education development intersect.

In the first area, we investigate how the campus or university social atmosphere is transformed for various ends, both positive and negative: repressing dissent or encouraging inter-group communication and tolerance. Here, we find that campuses can be cosmopolitan bastions for co-existence and egalitarian exchange but they can also remain neutral or even exacerbate ethnic, ideological, religious and class tensions that exist in wider society. To a large degree, the potential for campuses to achieve any peace-building outcomes relies on the university and higher education administrators to assemble a conducive campus environment. This is the second area we investigated. Here, we conclude that administrators have tools at their disposal that can both facilitate or directly support conflict resolution—for example through access and dissolution of societal hierarchies—but that some administrators do not know, are unwilling for various political reasons, or do so in misguided ways.

The third and final area we explored was the potential for universities to instill in students a culture and practice of academic, reflexive socialization—as opposed to imparting specific values and norms—in order to be able to recognize and come to terms with root causes of violence. The countries we studied have had mixed success in this respect, suggesting that the passage of time is generally helpful but some post-conflict regimes and political circumstances also allow for a much quicker reckoning. In this, we conclude that while avoiding a romantic mythologization of the secure past is challenging, confronting dark episodes of the past in order to learn from them is even harder, but also that much more necessary.

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