'Othering' and Violence in School: A Barrier to Sustain Peace in Nepal

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of othering and violence in school. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in five schools located in the fragile setting of Nepal for over six months. Using the idea of othering, this study unveils that the academically low performers and culturally undervalued students are more likely to be labelled as *Bhuskul*, the 'other'. This category is used to rationalize discrimination and use violence against the 'other'. With the cementing practices of 'othering' and violence, the schools are unable to foster values of peace and nonviolence but on the contrary, it will continue reinforcing structural violence and perpetuating direct violence. More research is required to understand and address the issue of inter-sectional othering process that normalize the discrimination and use of violence in school.

Author Bio(s)

Dr. Raj Kumar Dhungana is a peace educationist with over a decade long experience in Save the Children, UNICEF and UN Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific. He contributed to integrating peace, human rights, civics and disarmament related lessons in Nepal's national curriculum, textbooks and teacher training materials. Additionally, he was involved in integrating peace education in the national curriculum of schools in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan. He served as a co-convener of the Peace Education Commission, International Peace Research Association 2016-2018. He is active in peace research and teaching in Kathmandu University School of Education and working in Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu. He is interested in promoting peace, justice and good governance.

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Raj Kumar Dhungana

Othering and violence are critical problems in schools in multicultural societies (Borrero et al., 2012; Robinson & Saada, 2017; Saltmarsh & Davis, 2012; Tripathi, 2016). Despite investing huge amounts of resources into making schools a safe and enabling learning space for all, they are still one of the sites of exclusion and violence for many students, particularly for minority and non-heterosexual students (Maphalala & Mabunda, 2014; Olsen et al., 2014). Students are more at risk of Othering and violence in school because of their color, sex, sexual orientation, physical ability, class, and caste (Borrero et al., 2012; Khanal, 2017; Kumsairo, 2000; Maphalala & Mabunda, 2014; Takeuchi, 2009). Students' cultural capital determines how they are treated in school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) Hence, addressing Othering is essential for making schools more inclusive (Baak, 2020) and a safe space for education.

Violence and Othering are social constructs (Harber, 2004; Kumsairo, 2000; Tripathi, 2016) and are intersectional (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005; Price et al., 2019). Othering is a social isolation process that makes isolated students an easy target of victimization in school (Rinehart & Espelage, 2016). Othering describes a "specific way of excluding certain students who are different due to their gender, ethnicity, caste, ability, class, sexual orientation and/or religion" (Davies & McInnes, 2012, p.135). Students experience Othering through the process of categorization, discrimination, and exclusion (Borrero et al., 2012; Kumashiro, 2000; Saada, 2017; Takeuchi, 2009) and the phenomena of Othering, escalates violence (Staub, 2003). Gender, age, ethnicity, and past victimization are among many other forces contributing to school violence (Eisenbraun, 2007). It is essential to build knowledge that exposes the underlying causes that shape patterns and disparities in education (Milner, 2012). Thus, exploring the Othering process is particularly important when the society is hierarchical and divided along the intersections like religion, language, gender, caste, ethnicity, geographical location, and other identities (Khanal, 2017). This perspective of intersectionality captures issues of privilege and oppression resulting from various intersecting social categories such as gender, race, caste (Price et al., 2019).

While exploring violence and Othering, I apply the theoretical ideas of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990); Othering (Borrero et al., 2012; Kumashiro, 2000; Staub, 2003); intersectionality (Price et al., 2019) and a local perspective, *Jo Hocho Usko Mukhma Ghocho* ("the weak are at a

higher risk of being dominated") to explain the Nepali mythos of using violence against weak and marginalized community members. The primary theoretical base of this paper uses Galtung's ideas of structural and cultural violence in which the agent of violence is not an individual, rather a structure and culture (Galtung, 1969; 1990). Similarly, the local perspective *Jo Hocho Usko Mukhma Ghocho* is similar to the theory of risk society (Beck, 1998) which argues that risk is a social construct. Bialostok (2015) described that levelling and discrimination against certain groups of students increases the risks of dropping out of school, drug use, and violent behavior.

There is limited research available on how at-risk or Othered students are experiencing different forms of violence in schools in general and particularly in schools located in fragile contexts, i.e., those contexts in which political conflict is overt in addition to pervasive structural violence like discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, class, and gender. Using an ethnographic research approach, I explored how Othered adolescent students experience various forms of violence in school. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in 2015-2016 in Terai which is in the southern belt of Nepal. The Terai-Madhesh region is one of the fragile locations of Nepal.

The Fragile Context in Nepal's Terai-Madhesh Region

The Terai region comprises 20 districts and covers 17% of Nepal. It is a populous region, containing about 50% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The words Terai and *Madhesh* are used synonymously in Nepal. However, Terai primarily represents the geography of Nepal's southern plains whereas *Madhesh* represents the identity of *Madheshi*, one of the major ethnic communities living between the Nepali Hill originated *Pahadi* population and the *Madheshi*, the people living towards the Nepal-India border (Deysarkar, 2015). The most salient feature of the Terai is the categorization of the hill people as *Pahade* (including high mountain population) and the *Madheshi* living in the low-lying Terai region (McDonald & Vaughn, 2013). *Pahadi* population groups that include the caste groups like Brahmin, Chhetri and Dalits, and indigenous populations are in the majority and predominance in the overall ruling elite groups in Nepal. Because of this cultural orientation the *Madheshi* population are largely discriminated against by the *Pahade* majority groups in Nepal. There has been explicit tension between *Madheshi* and *Pahadi* populations in the Terai region as the Nepali mainstream politics have been politically ignoring the *Madheshi* (Upreti et al., 2013) and outermost the *Madheshi* are characterized as "unwanted" people (Rehnamol, 2017). The distinct cultural and language background of the *Madheshi* is one of the reasons for ignoring them and not wanting them in

mainstream politics. The *Madheshi* speak languages that originate from India; their kinship belongs with the Indian population. Thus, they are yet to be perceived as the equal citizens in Nepal (Bharti, 2019).

Aiming to gain political space and cultural identity, the *Madheshi* leaders formed political parties, built alliances, and organized a series of political protests in the Terai in 2007 (Upreti et al., 2013), and again in 2015-16. In addition, some small armed groups were also active in *Madhesh* and fighting for their rights (McDonald & Vaughn, 2013). Structural violence such as widespread discrimination against *Madheshi* population, as well as caste and gender-based violence is one of the major rationales of the political protests in Terai. Further, exploitation and discrimination, early marriage, and gender-based discrimination are even more prevalent amongst the *Madheshi*.

Terai-*Madhesh* is an unequal society. There is a huge variation in the standard of living between the three different *Madheshi* castes in the Terai, with the Human Development Index (HDI) ranging from 0.383 for the *Dalits*, 0.450 for the middle caste, and 0.625 for the upper caste (See Table 1; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016). In addition, there is a substantial socio-economic disparity between *Pahade* and *Madheshi* communities in Nepal.

Table 1.

Human Development Index across Pahade and Madheshi Groups in Nepal

Groups	Pahade (Brahmin, Chhetri and Indigenous Groups)	Pahade Dalit	Madheshi Excluding Dalits	Madheshi Dalits
HDI Value	0.538	0.446	0.460	0.400

The disparity in the overall development is equally reflected in the education system of Nepal. The children from the *Dalit* community go to the poorly resourced public schools whereas most of the students from the middle-high class and high caste groups attend private schools. The public schools in Nepal are prone to sporadic conflicts, political protests, and strikes which also affect students, on top of the long-standing marginalization of *Madeshi* in various realms like

education (Pherali, 2013). This disparity in HDI presents the need for equitable distribution of resources to improve the human development status of the *Madheshi* populations.

After the promulgation of Nepal's new Constitution in early 2015, several Terai-based political parties organized a prolonged protest demanding just distribution of political and development resources in the new Constitution. During this protest over five dozen people, including security personnel, were killed, and thousands were injured (Lawoti, 2016). Then in September 2015, while the country was just beginning to recover from the political protests, Nepal's neighboring country India, blocked the Nepal-India border stopping the cross-border trade and movement to express its unhappiness with certain parts of Nepal's new Constitution (Budhathoki & Gelband, 2016). The blockade continued for six months and had acute effects in the landlocked country. Nepal depends on India for almost 80% of its imports which come via road transport. Life in the Terai region of Nepal was highly affected by the blockade. In the meantime, the *Madheshi* population were protesting for justice. The protests were more for increased recognition of *Madheshi* populations including substantive redistribution of national resources and providing proportionate representation in decision making positions. This shows that marginalized groups require both redistribution and recognition as neither alone is sufficient (Fraser, 2009).

In general, the violent protests from the *Madheshi* were undesirable for the mainstream (Hindu, High Caste, Hill Population) political culture which is based on the state ideology, unity in diversity (Dhungana, 2021). The unity in diversity value is developed with a strong influence of Hindu traditions, the majority religion of Nepal. In the Hindu principle, violence refers to any sinful acts including those which cause pain to others. The dialectic of violence and nonviolence has coexisted uneasily in Hinduism for centuries (Rambachan, 2017). One of the major Hindu religious books, *Bhagavad Gita*, presents that the use of violence is a legitimate means to defend truth and justice, which is one of the key duties of a moral person. The idea of just violence emphasized the use of violence for the protection of religion (Dharma), as well as justice and truth (Srivastava et al., 2013). Chanakya, one of the influential ancient Hindu Pandits in South Asia, said "Take care of your children with love until five years and use physical and verbal assault for their education for next ten years" (Chanakya Niti [3:18]). On the one hand, people believe that Nepalese are peaceful people due to their multicultural traditions, cultures, its association with non-alignment movements, and Nepal being a birthplace of Buddha. On the

other hand, people are also inclined to believe violence is a legitimate means for creating peace and order. These cultural contradictions are also reflected in schooling in Nepal.

Methodology

In this section, I briefly introduce the participants, describe the ethnographic engagement processes in a fragile context and at the end present the major ethical considerations of this study.

Participants

I selected adolescents as a study population because they are generally more exposed to serious types of violence (Estevez et al., 2008); their dropout rate is higher than lower age groups in Nepal (Poyck et al., 2016) thus they are at risk of being Othered. I engaged in over 180 days of participatory observation, participation in curricular and extracurricular activities in five schools and conducted in-depth interviews with 220 students and teachers. Furthermore, 24 in-depth group discussions with 169 participants and follow up interviews with 51 participants were conducted. In the ethnographic engagement, I deeply engaged with the following anonymized participants:

Emani- (16): A Muslim girl, studying in grade ten, who was open, active, and often participating in extra activities. Her family wanted her to leave school to get married.

Nisa- (18): A shy eighth-grade *Madheshi* girl, who preferred to sit on the last bench and was mostly passive in her class.

Om- (16): A bold *Pahade* boy in tenth grade, living in the *Madheshi*-dominated area, and who was involved in violent conflict, and concerned about his security.

Ritu (18): A *Dalit* girl in ninth grade who was from the lowest and most marginalized caste and who perceived herself as a weak and bad student.

Sima-(16): A tenth grade *Madheshi* girl who was active in school but facing much cultural pressure to marry early and whose family did not value education.

Ethnography of School Violence

Doing a school ethnography in a fragile context is different from the traditional ethnographic approach. Litchmen (2013) suggested that a short period is sufficient to carry out

ethnography in an institutional setup. However, I had to spend a prolonged time in the ethnographic fieldwork to understand the complexities of the school culture and to work in the fragile context. School culture refers to its set norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and stories, which can be both written and unwritten (Peterson, 2002). I realized that the ethnographer needs enough time to understand the complexities of the school culture.

In such fragile contexts, sometimes a researcher must compromise their personal and emotional safety. Several risk factors are associated with the prolonged field engagement and such risks can be physical and psychological, and while sometimes these risks are only ephemeral, on occasion the risks can also endure for quite some time (Jakimow, 2020). I witnessed and experienced political protesters obstructing highways, vandalizing public buses, throwing stones at running buses, and setting running buses on fire during the fieldwork. I did not find any single research method that fully enabled me to conduct this research, thus I used a variety of research techniques including those encapsulated in what has been called the ethnography of violence, and the ethnography of schooling. Ethnography of violence takes place in the context of violence as it is and explores about violence (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) while ethnography of schooling considers students as engaged participants in the creation of school culture (Thapan, 2014). I had to continue adapting the ethnographic approaches in the fragile field and was ready to engage in a study that explores Othering and violence, and engaged with the students, the active participants of making school culture.

To be ready to experience violence in the field (Bornstein, 2002) and cope with the fragile situation, I had to be flexible to the context, and consider personal and participants' safety as some essential criteria for carrying out this study. These criteria emerged as the essential elements when undertaking an ethnography of school violence, and to understand the process of Othering.

Dealing with unpredictability and being sensitive were important methodological criteria adopted for this study. A sensitive ethnographer must work with uncertainties, stay in the challenging context, but also be informed about the research ethics appropriate to the fragile settings (Ford et al., 2009), and use a research approach that is grounded in the principle of doing what is in "the best interest of the child" (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2012). Very often schools close abruptly for an indefinite number of days with very short, or without notice. It is impossible to avoid the everydayness of the incidences of

violence in the field (Bornstein, 2002) and to avoid witnessing the violence against the Othered. It is useful to select multiple sites for the fieldwork to cope with any sudden obstructions in the field (Willoughby, 2016). During the fieldwork, most of the schools were closed due to political protests. However, I was able to continue my fieldwork in two schools near police stations which were therefore less exposed to the political protest.

Making the ethnographic research process sensitive to self and the participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) was the first criterion used in this study. Ethnographers have to take on double roles when Othering and violence are part of everyday life and perpetrators actively participate in violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In the field, I encountered numerous sensitive and ethical challenges. For example, when one of my participants disclosed that one of her classmates had been sexually assaulting her in school, due to my research ethics, I was unable to help my participant. I felt helpless in that situation, and I realized that such ethical challenges are common when conducting ethnographic fieldwork (Li, 2008). In an initial discussion, Sima, a tenth grade *Madheshi* girl shared that her family members did not discriminate against her. However, after a series of informal conversations, she confessed that this was not really the case, and she mentioned, "My family expects me to do all of the household chores, spend less money, use long sleeve dress and return home before dark but the same is not expected from my brother." I could feel the pain and surprise when Sima realized that she has been Othered and experienced discrimination in her family and further she was unknowingly supporting those processes. I was aware that her new awareness of being a "discriminated girl" in her family—because of my conversations with her—might increase tension in her family. This feeling was not pleasant, but I was equally conscious that an ethnographer undergoes emotional exhaustion in the field. Brown (2011) suggested that researchers need support to navigate their relationships in the field. I limited my role as an ethnographer, not engaging in each of the cases of discrimination and violence that I observed in the field. Sensitive ethnography in a fragile context means taking responsibility for the physical and emotional wellbeing of both the researcher and the participants.

The next criterion that emerged in this ethnographic study was about dealing with the ethnographer's (my own) identity. Due to the ongoing tension between *Madheshi* and *Pahade* communities in the field, my identity as a *Pahade* researcher was one of the major barriers to build rapport with the *Madheshi* students. Brown (2011) described how the researcher's race can

influence the trust and relationships between the researcher and the participants. During the fieldwork, one of the *Madheshi* boys even threatened me. He asked, "How can you imagine carrying out research on violence when your community, the *Pahade*, is the oppressor and responsible for what is happening to the *Madheshi* people?" In such situations, dealing with my identity was challenging as it increased the risk of being attacked. Further, some of the locals also suspected my research as part of a conspiracy against the *Madheshi* community. I disclosed my research objective with all the participants as it is one of the proven practices of ethnographic research (O'Reilly, 2005) and it was helpful to be firm, consistent, and build rapport with the local teachers, municipality officials, and local leaders in the field.

Engaging in transformative dialogues was another practice which I used while conducting this study. In the dialogical engagement in Sunsari district, a 16-year-old *Madheshi* girl asked me, "How can we go out like boys?" She further added, "We have to stay under the control of our parents otherwise we will be ruined." I asked a counter-question: "Why not? What will happen if you go out as boys?" Such critical dialogue encouraged adolescent participants to reflect upon their experiences related to gender-based discrimination. Often, being critical might not be enough to challenge cultural violence in a context where people not only tolerate violence, but they also oppress themselves actively by taking part in the oppressive process (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). I applied the transformative dialogical approach (Siry, 2010) by encouraging the research participants to ask critical questions that might empower the participants to question their lived experience of being Othered. In the school, teachers were aware that I was studying related to Othering and violence in school. I believe that some students' suffering was reduced because the teachers feared being noticed for using Othering and direct violence like corporal punishments. Further, the critical ethnographers implicitly and explicitly can make humanist appeals for justice (Bornstein, 2002).

Ethnography of school violence is sensitive research and therefore requires vigorous efforts in maintaining high ethical standards. The Hindu notion of "Nonviolence as a duty" and the Buddhist belief of "There is an end to suffering" are my principle ethical guidance within this study. I was informed about the research ethics in conflict settings (Ford, et al., 2009), and the research approach that is based on the best interest of child (UNICEF, 2012). In this study I used non-violent and non-threatening engagement with participants, avoided the activities that potentially create or escalate risks towards the participants life, and particularly towards those

Othered. Similarly, I maintained confidentiality and anonymity, respected cultural and other differences, and dealt with my stereotypes and biases. In the next section, I present how Othering is being cemented in the schooling process.

<div align="center">**Othering and Violence in School**</div>

Adolescent Student's Experiences of Othering in School

With increased access to schooling, a large majority of adolescents spend a significant time in schools where they are exposed to both positive and negative life experiences. In the schools, students are labeled as *Bhuskul* (student having weak working memory), *najanne* (less knowledgeable), *adham* (stubborn), and *jauwa* (freaky, violent, and undisciplined). The term *Bhuskul* is the most common label representing the student who is an academically low achiever; recognized as lousy; an outsider; a slow learner; and/or a bad student. I used the term *Bhuskul* to represent the Othered students in school.

Om, an 18-year-old *Pahade* student, born in *Madhesh*, mentioned, "I was involved in one fistfight with the *Madheshi* boys in the recent past; I am feeling unsafe living in this area after that fight." Om's sense of insecurity and involvement in a fistfight shows that students' fights in school can create a sense of insecurity among students. This kind of small fistfight can lead to communal clashes. A *Madheshi* student who was studying in grade 10 at the same school as Om reported, "Our friends are *Madheshi*, not Nepali [for him Nepali means *Pahade*]". The students studying in the same class were divided based on ethnic groups, *Pahade* and *Madheshi*.

The fragile schooling context in the *Madhesh* was not only affecting students' association with their community group and selection of friendship but it was also visible in the classroom setting. In the two schools, I observed that the students were seated in different clusters based on their ethnic and cultural background. Because of increased communal divide and violence, *Pahade* students and teachers were feeling unsafe in some schools located in the *Terai*. Due to the ongoing tension between *Pahade-Madheshi* communities, a similar sense of fear existed among *Madheshi* students and teachers in hill-based schools. The Assistant District Education Officer confirmed the increased tension in schools. He mentioned, "Due to the violence in the Terai, *Pahade* teachers are feeling insecure. In some cases, *Pahade* teachers are hesitating to go to their assigned schools." In the fragile context, both the students and the teachers found school to be an unsafe space.

Further, I explored how the low performing students experienced their schooling. Nisa, a 10-grader girl who considered herself as a weak student claimed:

> We are weak students. Teachers say that we are dumb; we know nothing. They shout at us and beat us, but they do not say anything to Irfan. [Irfan was perceived to be an exemplary student in her class] When we are late to the class, teachers do not allow us to go in but if Irfan comes late, it is not a problem.

The weak students experience exclusion and discrimination in school. Schools expect that the *Bhuskuls* will frequently be absent from class, will not follow the instruction of teachers, and will perform poorly in periodic assessments. The students identified themselves as weak primarily based on the scores they get in the formal assessments. In general, the lower caste group were the at-risk students and were lower performing than the high caste groups. However, due to overt violence in their context, it was not an exception to encounter some high caste—the privileged students—who were also at-risk.

Labeling as a Process of Othering

The students who are labeled as *Bhuskul*, often become stubborn and inclined to break the school's rules. During class, it was normal to see some students sitting outside of the classroom. I interviewed one of the girls who was talking with her friend on the playground. She was one of the 14 students sitting outside the class on that day. I approached her and, when she agreed, we had the following conversation:

> Me: Hey, how are you?
>
> Ritu: I am OK! [hesitant and feeling a bit uncomfortable]
>
> Me: Why are you here (out of the class) today?
>
> Ritu: We are not acceptable students [saying it but not so serious] and teachers do not want us to be in the class. They don't ask why we are out of the class; they care only about the good students.
>
> ME: Why don't you go to the class?
>
> Ritu: Who cares whether we go into the class or not? The teacher says, "Those students who disturb my class can leave my class." So, we are happy to be on the ground!
>
> Skipping the English class was normal for Ritu and many other *Bhuskul* students in the

school. When a school labeled students like *Bhuskul*, it is normal for them to skip classes. Surprisingly, the headteacher considers such behavior normal. He said, "The *Bhuskul* students

like Ritu, cannot be corrected without punishment." This shows that the teachers and school administration blame the students for their low academic achievement and present them as the victims of the system (Stanforth & Rose, 2018).

Despite having some sympathy towards the low performing students, the exclusion, neglect, and punishment of the low performing students in academic assessments is a normal part of school culture. Teachers and students' preconceptions about students' perceived learning achievement determine how much teachers care about the student (Takeuchi, 2009). Similarly, intersectional identities constructed based on the caste, ethnicity, language, and economic status are equally influential determinants of teacher's behaviour towards the students. The *Bhuskul* identity is constructed based on students' cultural capital; primarily their academic performance. Nisa, who categorized herself as a *Bhuskul*, said "Teachers only engage with better performing students, allow them to sit on the front seats, and do not punish them for their mistakes." This anecdote presents a case of how teacher's double standards are reflected in schooling and plays roles in the Othering processes (Takeuchi, 2009). Further Sima, a *Madheshi* adolescent girl, stated,

> I cannot speak Nepali (language) well. At home, we speak Maithili [smile...!] and until grade five, I went to a school where all teachers were speaking Awadhi. [One of the local languages in *Madhesh*] You know, I do not speak with teachers here and I have few friends. I lost many classes due to bandh (political strikes/violence). Teachers think that I am *Bhuskul* and so they don't interact with me. They speak with other smart students like Rahman. [the first boy of her class] I think I will fail the exam. What can I do? [... silence....!]

Aiming to gain more understanding of how teachers behave with the *Bhuskul* students, I observed a class in another school:

> It was 11.15 am, after the bell, the social studies teacher entered the class and said, "OK class, open your books and write answers to questions four and five on page 25." I realized that after asking students to write the answers, the teacher approached the class's top student, Irfan, and spent 5-7 minutes with him explaining how to write answers clearly. There were altogether 51 students and Irfan was one of the luckiest students who got the teacher's personal attention. (January 17, 2016).

I found that the student's Othered identity is deeply influenced by the student's perceived academic performance in school which is reinforced by other cultural identities or labels. Sima's narration demonstrates that the multiple cultural factors like language, caste, academic performance, and family environment contributed to make her *Bhuskul,* the Othered. The Othered category and weak academic performance in formal assessments are mutually reinforcing. As such school is the field that produces and reproduces the dominated identities (Bourdiue & Passeron, 1990) like *Bhuskul*.

These anecdotes related to the adolescent students' experiences of Othering demonstrate an alarming situation of Othering that justifies the systemic use of violence in Nepalese schools. The Terai region's fragile context might exacerbate the Othering process and violence in school. However, this study reaffirms that school is a space where the Othered are treated in harmful ways (Kumashiro, 2000). The Othered are more prone to experience direct forms of violence such as corporal punishment in school (Marsh, 2018). Further, normalizing the exclusion, Othering and violence allows perpetrators to see their behavior as acceptable and to justify their violent actions (Staub, 2003). The practices of discrimination and the culture of silence operate together to effect violent norms (Saltmarsh, 2012). Generally, the teachers, students, and school management committee representatives hesitate to speak about issues related to Othering and violence, as they consider Othering and violence as highly sensitive issues.

It is dangerous when individuals, groups, or the state remain passive about the Othering process (Staub, 2003). Emani, a Muslim girl stated that, "It is better to remain silent. If we speak about our teachers' misconduct, they will damage our future career, and nobody will believe us." Remaining silent and not acting against the perpetrators is preferred among the students who get less support from their peers and family members. Further, the teachers and students do not raise their voice with the school administration about the unfair treatment while the Othered students like Muslim girl Sima and *Dalit* girl Ritu are fully aware of being neglected and discriminated in the class and the students like Irfan who is performing better in formal exams is favored.

Normalizing Violence through the Othering processes in School

Othering processes dishonor *Bhuskul* students in school. Categorization or labeling is the initial step used in the Othering process. Often categorization and stereotyping are the tools used to maintain the superiority of one group over others. Vincent (2012) explained this kind of human relationship on a continuum of violence.

Religion and rituals that justify violence based on its judgment of who is right and who is wrong are problematic. Galtung (1990) described his own occidental tradition as being characterized by dichotomies between God/good and the devil/evil. The dominant Hindu tradition accepts the use of violence when it is the only way to defend the truth. "Violence can be used if needed and justifiable" is the moral principle of a just war (Burke, 2004). Similarly, cinema and TV shows sometimes promote the value of just violence by presenting the importance of using violence to defend good (Estevez et al., 2008) and suppress the bad.

Cultural symbols play an important role in Othering and tolerating and justifying exclusion and violence at home and in school. In Nepal, the local mythos, *Jo Hocho, Usko Mukhma Ghocho* (the weaker are at a higher risk of being dominated) is one of the most common sayings in schools and wider society. Such mythos is also reflected in human interaction in everyday life of society and school. Schools exclude and punish minority students (Khanal, 2017; Simson, 2014). The students who live in a high-risk cultural context and who have a low ability to respond to the violence are at risk of being dominated and Othered. The Othering process ultimately leads to dehumanization and justifies the use of violence against the Othered (Staub, 2003). As a result, many Othered students like Nisha had to dropout from schools and never return while students like Om and Irfan are more likely to find more options in their life. Nisha, explained her situation:

> I have to collect fodder for goats and a buffalo, cook food and wash dishes before coming to school. I must stay at home and look after my small brother when my parents are busy. My sister got married and dropped out when she was studying in grade seven.

The Government monitors school against set targets and special measures, such as how many students pass final exams and how many are retained (Harber & Sakade, 2009). Those special measures are more compatible with the culture of the dominant group. Academic performance and violence are interrelated as the better performers experience less violence than so-called low performers. While school's overall improvement in academic performance is a central causal factor in reducing violence and enhancing a school's climate (Benbenishty et.al., 2016), the power-driven school structure, curriculum, pedagogy and practices justify the use of violence, or at least do not reject the use of violence (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1990; Galtung, 1990; Kumashiro, 2000). In addition to the context, students' historical and cultural backgrounds (e.g., their caste, physical/mental abilities, ethnicity, and language competencies) are equally important

contributors to Othering processes. For example, the academic performance among the marginalized communities is generally low compared with high caste and class groups in Nepal (Khanal, 2017; Poyck et al., 2016) and thus these groups' low performance is generally expected and accepted.

The school system generally follows the middle-class' ideology and sets their norms and standards in the curriculum; choice of pedagogies and assessments; and routines; and ignores the norms and values of Othered (Borrero et. al., 2012). Thus, students who do not comply with the dominant standards and norms are invisible in the teaching-learning process (Apple, 1995). In Nepal, the culture and norms of the *Dalits*, Muslim girls, disabled, *Madheshi*, and the *Tharu* indigenous groups are less compatible with the schools' standard norms and values as school culture is generally determined and defined by the dominant Hindu High Caste *Pahade* culture (Khanal, 2017). The *Bhuskul*, whose culture and identity are different from the school's standard norm are Othered in school (Harber 2004; Kumashiro, 2000) and the violence rationalized through the Othering process cannot be dealt with unless the school environment is made safe and inclusive for all (Simson 2014).

Challenging the rooted Othering process is more difficult when the students come to school prepared to be marginalized and Othered as it is an accepted part of their culture, and teachers are trained to follow the discriminatory practices and use of violence against the *Bhuskul* students. Often, classmates expect that teachers will humiliate the Othered in the class (Kohli, 2016) and the Othered students also voluntarily get involved in school gangs because such association gives them some power and sense of belonging and to make them visible (Staff & Kreager, 2008). Importantly, the intersection of multiple identities such as *Dalit*, economically poor, *Madheshi*, and low performing students are at high risk of Othering in school. The intersectionality perspective is useful to understand how students suffer from multiple levels of discrimination and as objects of labeling (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). The narration of Emani, a Muslim girl with low educational achievement in the Hindu majority community, presents how cultural values, gender norms, and low academic performance are mutually compelling to marrying at an early age. The Othered student's suffering and experiences of violence significantly affect the student's mental health and academic achievements (Price et.al, 2019).

Little other research also presents marginal benefits of being labelled or Othered in school. Marginally, labelling the students as Other makes them noticeable as they get a certain

identity, like fighter (Noddings, 2012) and it helps some students, to prove their masculinity in a system that keeps them otherwise powerless (Klein, 2006).

Despite some efforts to include curricular content that promotes multicultural values in Nepali education system since the 1990s (Dhungana, 2021), the practices of labeling and Othering processes produce students who not only accept the violence but also take part in reproducing violence (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1991). Many schools and actors are working to identify, address, and overcome the challenge of Othering (Baak, 2019) embedded in school culture. For example, Nepali curricular reform and multicultural peace education initiatives (Dhungana, 2021) empowered teachers to discuss the complex issues of intersectionality and Othering in school. Yet Nisha, a *Madheshi* girl has been silently accepting when teachers humiliate her; calling her *Bhuskul* and giving her physical punishments. Victimized students like Nisha blame themselves for their own fates (Unnever & Cornell, 2003) and are unlikely to get additional academic support and mentoring necessary for academic success. Dominant culture in Nepal is not empowering the Othered students to develop their dignified recognition in school and not making any serious efforts for equitable distribution of resources (Fraser, 2009). Rather, the school system is accepting the ongoing process of Othering and making the school as unequal space for the dominant group students and the *Bhuskul*, the Othered.

The students with lower academic performance and belonging to culturally marginalized groups due to their intersectional identities based on factors like language and/or ethnic identity, are more likely to be Othered in school. In Nepal, the cultural norms of the *Dalits*, Muslim girls, disabled, *Madheshi*, and the *Tharu* indigenous groups are less compatible with the schools' standard norms and values. Thus, for the marginalized, especially the students with lower academic achievement and the culturally oppressed groups, school is a disempowering space as the use of violence against them is being accepted as a normal part of schooling.

Conclusions

Considering education as one of the important sectors to foster peace, Nepal has been making efforts to sustain peace after a long period of systemic violence. However, schools are not contributing to sustaining peace. On the contrary, they are a place that reproduces violence against the Othered. If the government truly wants to build a peaceful society, then the ongoing situation of Othering and violence needs to be addressed. Some initiatives are already started by including contents of multiculturalism and peace in the national school curriculum. The intensity

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of Othering and violence might be varied in accordance with the time, contexts, and the quality of education. However, serious efforts toward revisiting schooling that empowers the Othered through the recognition of the differences and just redistribution of resources are not yet initiated. School is probably the best place to start educating teachers and administrators about the phenomenon of intersectional Othering processes and enable them to challenge the normalized practices of Othering and violence in school. Hence, questioning the issue of Othering is critical in school because it empowers students toward larger and lasting implications for peace in Nepal and beyond. The discriminatory and violent school system and culture cannot ensure justice and peace for all, especially for the Othered. The specific research methods like ethnography of school violence enables researchers to understand the Othering, discrimination, and violence rooted in the schools located in unequal societies.

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