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Critical Pedagogy: Practicing Freedom Through Education in a Prisoner of War Camp

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**Critical Pedagogy:
Practicing Freedom through Education in a Prisoner of War Camp**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Graduation with Honors**

By
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
I. Prologue	1
II. Critical Pedagogy Goals	10
III. Critical Pedagogy Methods	17
IV. War Stories	26
V. The School	36
VI. Conclusion	69
Endnotes	73
Bibliography	75

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Prologue

The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the rest of my thesis. I've included a purpose statement in order to explain what inspired this project in the first place, and what sustained it until the end. Next, I've shared a personal background story in order to contextualize the stories that follow in my third and fourth chapters. This background story is important because it allows readers to gain a better understanding of my father's character in the rest of the story. Finally, I close this chapter with a section on methodology, which is meant to explain and justify my use of interviewing and storytelling as my primary research and writing methods.

Purpose Statement

The concept for this project was born in my *Communication Ethics* class, which I took during my sophomore year at Regis University. I remember sitting in that class with heart drumming and a pounding in my ears as we learned about critical pedagogy—a radical way of educating which promotes freedom and change, and empowers both teachers and students to participate in the process.

There was something very exciting—and familiar—about critical pedagogy. I'd never heard of it before, or read Paulo Freire's works, but I had seen his work in action. I had seen his way of teaching in my father's example as a parent, and in stories I'd heard about his experience teaching in a prisoner of war (POW) camp in Somalia. Last semester, when my father passed away, it became increasingly clear from the outpouring of stories and loving memories that he was a transformational leader and an exceptional teacher. Hearing these stories gave life to the theories of critical pedagogy by showing them in action.

Retelling these stories also allowed me to preserve my father's memory in writing, and commemorate those who worked alongside him, making education possible in their POW camp. When I first considered sharing these stories, I was discouraged by the monumental task ahead of me. I doubted myself and my right to tell these stories—after all, they had happened before my time and I had played no part in them. In the process of telling their stories, I risked misrepresenting characters and oversimplifying the plot. In the process of conducting research and drawing conclusions, I risked being wrong and worse, sounding naïve. In order to commence this project, I had to overcome these fears and claim my right to tell these stories.

It didn't help when I was first introduced to Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006) during my senior year at Regis University. By then, I was committed to this project. There was no turning back—but I almost did after reading Frankl's explanation of his perspective as a former concentration camp inmate during WWII:

To attempt a methodical presentation of this subject is very difficult, as psychology requires a certain scientific detachment. But does a man who makes his observations while he himself is a prisoner possess the necessary detachment? Such detachment is granted to the outsider, but he is too far removed to make any statements of real value. Only the man inside knows... I will leave it to others to distill the contents of this book into dry theories.¹

I am the outsider. I will leave it up to readers to decide whether or not I've made "any statements of real value." But in order to even start this project, I had to believe in my ability to contribute something valuable to the conversation surrounding critical pedagogy. And in the

process of completing this project, the stories themselves motivated me to keep writing. They speak for themselves, without me distilling them into “dry theories.”

The first story that needs to be told is my parents' background story, because it allows readers to understand my father's character. In the story, I refer to my mother and father by their first names because it seems to me that in a sense, they were different people. They were not the “Mom” and “Dad” that I knew. They were figures in a legendary tale. I looked up to *those people* but the Mom and Dad I knew, I took for granted. This personal background story provides context for the stories that follow, and gives insight into my parents' characters.

Background Story

Lishan listened to the voice of her husband Tibebu, speaking over the phone. He seemed to be choosing his words carefully. I can't leave them, he said, without a doctor—I have to go back. Lishan and Tibebu were vacationing in the capital Addis Ababa, before returning to the rural region Ogaden, where Tibebu worked as a medical doctor. In two days, they would return to the countryside and leave the comforts of the city behind.

When he hung up the phone, Tibebu told his wife that a colleague from Ogaden had just called. The man was leaving the region because living and working there had become unsafe as the war advanced within Ethiopian borders. Tibebu reasoned that since the man was leaving, and there were no other doctors to serve the people there, he had to return. Lishan saw the look of resolve in her husband and didn't try to convince him otherwise—her only argument was, I'm coming with you.

With the help of Lishan's relatives, Tibebu gently but firmly reasoned with her that it was better for him to go first and send for her when the situation was more stable. This was their

second year of marriage, with one baby and another on the way. It was too risky for Tibebe's young family to come with him, so he left them behind—"And that's how we got separated for eleven years," says my mother as she recounts the story.

Tibebe was taken the same day Rekik was born. Not coincidentally, Lishan gave their daughter a name that means "mystery." Although she was devastated, she believed that God had a purpose in all this—even if she didn't understand it fully. For the first five years, she operated on blind faith, not knowing whether Tibebe was alive but believing that they would be reunited. After five years, she heard news from a trusted source that he was alive and well. She got real proof of this after nine years, when someone brought a personal note to Lishan in Tibebe's own writing.

Tibebe also believed that he would be reunited with his family. He was known in the camp for his confidence that he and his fellow prisoners would be released and return to their country one day. In fact, this hope is what drove him to promote education among his people, so that they would not return to their country without the necessary skills and knowledge to rebuild and reintegrate themselves.

Tibebe was also known among his friends and acquaintances for his confidence and trust in his wife. He was confident that he wouldn't return to a broken home like Ato Temachu, the legendary Ethiopian warrior who returned from war to find his wife with another man. I will find my wife waiting for me, Tibebe boldly proclaimed. In his tenth year of imprisonment, Tibebe came across a radio on one of his rounds as a practicing doctor. The words he heard were in his language, and the woman speaking was Lishan. A journalist by trade, she hosted a Christian

radio show. That week, she happened to be hosting a series about Christian love and marriage, and giving counsel on broken homes and relationships.

This story has many angles. On one hand, it's an inspiring love story. On the other, it tells of faith and hope. These are equally great and inseparable values. I'm going to shift now, but these values remain in the foreground. Love, faith, and hope inspired my father and his fellow prisoners to do the heroic things they did for one another. The school which was established in the POW camp of Haway was established on these values, and in order to learn more about the school, I interviewed people who were involved in it, as teachers and students. The following section explains the methods I used to research and write this thesis, and why I chose to conduct my research and writing in this way.

Methodology

Readers of this story are audience to the stories that have shaped and molded me. Yet despite hearing these stories all my life, I am still amazed by the heroic actions of my father and his fellow prisoners. Readers will hear the surprise in my voice as I relay these stories, some of which I'm hearing for the first time. They will also hear the warm familiarity with which I relay stories that have been passed on by my mother, and which I will probably pass on to my children. My voice can be heard throughout this project, from beginning to end, because of this project's personal nature. I'm using my voice "to raise social consciousness" about the struggles and victories of a people who educated themselves in the midst of their oppression.²

I've used the autoethnographic research method to gather and interpret data. This method is a hybrid between ethnography and autobiography, because it uses cultural and behavioral analysis to interpret autobiographic material. It allows me to use my own voice and background

to interpret the cultural and social implications of my father's teaching methods and leadership style. This "linkage between the self and the social" is characteristic of autoethnography.³

I chose to use this method because I don't think it would be desirable or even possible to tell this story without using my own voice. I couldn't tell this story in third person, or with an outsider's detachment (even though I am an outsider), because this is *my* story--even though it's not about me, and even though I wasn't alive at the time of these events. Still, I'm presenting biographical material about family members and people who share my cultural and ethnic identity. I consider them and their stories an extension of my "self," because their stories have shaped my identity. Through in-depth interviewing, I've collected these stories and through narrative-textual analysis, I'm retelling these stories—which I humbly consider part of my own story.

In-depth interviews are a standard ethnographic method, which can generate rich responses with the use of "semi-structured, open-ended questions."⁴ I chose to interview my research participants, as opposed to surveying or observing them, because of this possibility of generating rich responses with the right questions. Indeed, once I knew what I was looking for and formed my questions with that in mind, I was able to draw incredibly rich responses from my interviewees, even if their responses didn't always affirm my hunch that critical pedagogy was practiced in their POW school.

Here are a few examples of questions which I asked my interviewees:

1. What role did Dr. Tibebu play in the school and prison camp? Describe your encounters with him in prison.

2. What motivated you to continue learning/teaching? What discouraged you from learning/teaching?
3. How did you communicate with your teachers, students, prison guards, and fellow prisoners in the classroom? What teaching methods were used in the classroom?

The last two questions were formed with specific critical pedagogy themes in mind. For example, question two was based on Freire's idea that education is a hopeful response to problems that we face. By asking about the things that motivated and discouraged people from the pursuit of education, I was trying to gauge the significance of hope and despair in the prisoners' education. Question three was meant to access the idea of dialogue, and responses to this question were informative and insightful even when they were unexpected.

Everything I've come to know about the prison camp and its prisoners—every personal and historical detail—was relayed to me through stories. I wouldn't have learned certain things if I hadn't interviewed the specific people who relayed those stories to me. Some stories were told repeatedly, like stock phrases, so I was able to rely on them for verifiability. The more people told the same story, the more “historical” or “factual” it was. But there were certain stories that I may never hear in the same way, or hear ever again, because they were so personal and powerful. It took a lot from and for those people to tell their stories.

Among those people is my mother, who is an excellent storyteller and life-long participant in my personal search for stories. She has always encouraged my interest in stories. Although she was not with my father during his time in prison, she spoke of it more than he did, when he was alive. Her ability to communicate things she didn't experience, especially for someone who only heard about my father's imprisonment through smuggled news and rumors

until they were reunited, shows me what is possible with storytelling—and enables me to share my own story with readers.

Other than my mother, I interviewed nine people: Tadele, Seleshi M., Terefe, Kebedech, Eyasu, Belaynesh, Sabit, Selashi K., and Tilahun. These people were former prisoners of war from the Ethiopian-Somali War (1977-1978), and had participated in the POW school. Tadele, Kebedech, Belaynesh, and Tilahun were teachers, while Seleshi M., Terefe, Eyasu, Sabit, and Selashi K. were students. However, I discovered in the process of interviewing that there was overlap between teaching and learning in the POW school--so that teachers learned as they taught, and students taught as they learned.⁵ As we will see in the following chapter, this overlap is very characteristic of critical pedagogy.

The use of in-depth interviewing “allows and provides room for rich, narrative descriptions.”⁶ My open-ended questions allowed my interviewees to interpret questions with some freedom, providing me with a collection of distinct narratives. I treated these narratives as texts, and analyzed them according to the critical pedagogy goals and methods discussed in my second and third chapters. I used these standards to formulate interview questions and also to analyze my interviewees' responses. In my fifth chapter, entitled "The School," I share the findings of my critical analysis.

In "The School," I've weaved together a new story using a collection of old stories. This new story integrates different points of view, including my own. Readers will hear my interjections throughout the text, where I raise questions and critically reflect on the story being told. This process of questioning and reflecting is characteristic of critical pedagogy, which challenges people to raise questions and develop a critical consciousness of the world around

them. By using my own voice, raising questions, and critically reflecting upon my own work, I've modeled my thesis upon the goals and methods of critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy Goals

In this chapter, I will discuss three goals which people can strive for via critical pedagogy: liberation, transformation, and transgression. The first two are covered in the section below, which shares Freire's perspective as well as my own questions and reflections on liberty and transformation. Meanwhile, I've borrowed from bell hooks' perspective to discuss the topic of transgression, in the second section. Both Freire and hooks are prominent figures in the field of critical pedagogy, and both have influenced and informed my studies of the field. Finally, I will conclude each section by connecting them with my study of the POW school. At that point, I will raise critical questions and hypothesize about the kind of answers I expect to find.

Liberation and Transformation: Becoming More Human

Paulo Freire is often credited as the forefather of critical pedagogy, which promotes the liberating and transformative education of oppressed and oppressor populations *by* the oppressed. According to Freire, the great task of people everywhere is to become more human.⁷ Dehumanization and oppression are historical facts that are, according to him, subject to change. Oppressed people do not have to accept their reality as fixed or unchangeable; otherwise, it would be pointless to engage in the struggle against dehumanization and oppression.⁸

Freire challenges the idea that oppressed people are helpless and must depend upon humanitarian efforts of their superiors. In fact, he argues that the oppressed ought to play the lead role in restoring humanity to themselves and their oppressors. "This then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well."⁹ This

endeavor is not meant to create a greater divide between the two parties; rather, it is meant to be carried out in solidarity, with the two sides fighting together side by side.

Without hope, people are unable to engage in the struggle for their own freedom. The hopeless person thinks, “I have no tomorrow that is any different than today, that is any different from yesterday.”¹⁰ Their experience disables them from being able to conceptualize a different tomorrow, and they disqualify themselves from the struggle because they do not believe they have any role to play in their own liberation and transformation. In the past, they have been shoved down and pushed around by circumstances that are stacked against them. This has formed their fatalistic point of view, causing them to believe that they have no influence over their circumstances or even themselves.

This fatalistic outlook is a weapon that people wield against themselves and each other, to keep from assuming responsibility for their situation (both internal and external). In fact, people may have no control over their circumstances, particularly if they are oppressed. However, despite unyielding circumstances, they can experience internal freedom and transformation in their ways of thinking and (re)acting towards their circumstances.

For this reason, Freire believes that education is just as much about “dreams and utopia” as it is about “technical, scientific, and professional development.”¹¹ In other words, education is not just about training farmers to be better farmers. Education is about enabling farmers to be better people. It’s about developing dreams and a better world. The idea that education should aim for a better world is held as an ideal; those who attempt to reach it often end up disillusioned and resign to easier tasks.

Freire addresses those who might dismiss his hope as naive. He doesn't make light of the struggle for liberation and transformation through education. He acknowledges the difficulty, even the improbability, of the struggle resolving in favor of the revolutionary:

Hope of liberation does not mean liberation already. It is necessary to fight for it, within historically favorable conditions. If they do not exist, we must hopefully labor to create them. Liberation is a possibility, not fate nor destiny nor burden. In this context, one can realize the importance of education for decision, for rupture, for choice, for ethics at last.¹²

Education enables people to take on what seemed insurmountable before—if not their circumstances, then the way that they react to their circumstances. This ruptures the pattern of submission and conformity to the status quo, to the idea that “it’s always been this way.” Where there was no choice before, there is suddenly a choice. In reality, there is always a choice—even if it’s life or death. What has changed is our ability to perceive it. By challenging the view that “we have no tomorrow,” and giving us hope for a better tomorrow, education motivates us to join the struggle for freedom.

Effective education goes deeper than surface-level awareness and affects the way we perceive the world. It widens our scope and enhances our view, so that our viewpoint is not so narrow. It develops critical consciousness in students, which “does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.”¹³

Critical pedagogy is not satisfied with simply defining or compartmentalizing ideas. Rather, it is concerned with exploring the root causes and reasons behind *why* the world operates

the way it does. By digging deep, critical pedagogy aims to develop critical consciousness in students so that they can truly *know* reality. “When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality.”¹⁴ As critical consciousness develops, so does the students’ perception and understanding of the world.

Keeping in mind that my research participants were former *prisoners* of war, I was interested to find out how far we could take Freire's ideals of liberation and transformation in their POW camp. Did people try to access these ideals or pursue them in any way? And if so, what did liberty look like in the context of their prison? What did transformation look like? These were questions that really piqued my interest and drove my research.

Teaching to Transgress: Moving Beyond Norms and Boundaries

bell hooks, a contemporary educator, is inspired by Freire's radical ideas. Her “engaged pedagogy” calls both teachers and students to *engage* in the struggle for freedom as active participants in their education.¹⁵ This pedagogy educates and empowers both teachers and students in the classroom, so that teachers are learning at the same time as they are teaching, and students are teaching at the same time as they are learning.¹⁶

In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks presents different models of education from her own background. Growing up in the state of Kentucky, her grade school experience was marked by racial segregation. The first school she attended was a segregated black school, and she remembers her experience here with appreciation. Here, the teacher’s role was political—charged with the duty of enabling their students to overcome their obstacles and fulfill their destinies. hooks’ black teachers were on a mission to “uplift the race.”¹⁷ Her experience in these

classrooms was exciting, even enticing, because she could transcend expectations and boundaries, and reinvent herself by learning and applying new ideas.

As schools were slowly desegregated, hooks and her fellow black students were integrated into a formerly all-white school. At this new school, black students were the outliers. Their presence encroached upon and disrupted the normalcy that had existed before. In order to prove themselves, they had to conform to the standard of intelligence and success created for and by their white counterparts. hooks' classroom experience was now defined by conformity and submission to authority, rather than freedom and transformation. She grew to hate school as it became "a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility."¹⁸

Despite more experiences like this, hooks remained hopeful that education *could be* as freeing and transforming as it had been at her first school. But as she moved on to higher education and eventually earned the titles of "Doctor" and "professor," her classroom experience became progressively burdensome and confining. She found that most professors relied on the banking model of education, which is only concerned with "the transfer of informational content to the learners."¹⁹ In these classrooms, she was expected to receive, internalize, and repeat information back to the teacher. She was only required to absorb whatever she was taught, not to understand it or be changed by it.

When hooks began teaching, she found that some students were so conditioned by this banking model that they resisted the opportunities she gave them to think for themselves. The idea that they possessed freedom and autonomy as students was foreign to many of them. The idea that "whoever learns teaches in the act of learning," implemented by hooks in many of her

classroom practices, was new and different.²⁰ These ideas are characteristic of Freire's critical pedagogy and hooks' engaged pedagogy, but they are so radical that they require some time to unlearn certain ways of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Freire's alternative to the banking model allows students to be their own teachers, liberators, and creators of their own pedagogy.²¹ He links the liberation of the oppressed with the liberation of the student, which is not surprising due to the fact that many of Freire's students *were* oppressed. He worked with a number of marginalized groups, including the illiterate poor and peasant farmers of Brazil. As a young student, he himself experienced bouts with poverty and hunger. Freire's model, adopted by bell hooks, is appropriately called the problem-posing model, because it problematizes and challenges norms in the classroom and society at large.

In the POW camps where my father and his fellow prisoners were held, I was interested to find out what model of education was practiced, and whether or not the prisoners' education aimed to move beyond norms and boundaries. I looked for telltale signs among the prisoners, like any kind of resistance or refusal to submit to unjust authorities. I also looked for any signs of initiative among the prisoners, especially in pursuit of their education, since this is implied in the act of "*moving* beyond norms and boundaries." Essentially, I was looking for answers to these questions: Did resistance exist in their prison camp? If so, what did it look like? Did prisoners show initiative or "take charge" when it came to their education? What kind of boundaries were crossed? What kind of norms were challenged? Honestly, I didn't expect to find much resistance in the POW camp, but I was pleasantly surprised that this was practiced in unexpected ways.

Transgression is both a goal to be accessed and a method to be practiced. I've posed it here as a goal to be accessed because this challenges other ways of thinking about transgression,

including my own. I am reminded that transgression can be a good thing, when it pushes students to challenge unnecessary boundaries in the classroom, or when it means challenging the unjust law of a civilian POW camp. But in the second scenario, the stakes are higher, and may even cost one's life. I don't think it's worth it to transgress for the sake of transgression, which is why I think it's necessary to transgress with a higher goal or purpose in mind. In the following chapter, I will explore other critical pedagogy methods that allow students and teachers to access the higher goals of liberation and transformation through education.

Critical Pedagogy Methods

This chapter proposes different ways of accessing the goals of liberation, transformation, and transgression which were discussed in the previous chapter. Previously, I mentioned that transgression is both a goal and a method, which distinguished it from liberation and transformation. In this chapter, I propose active participation, dialogue, and language as ways of accessing freedom and change in the classroom and the outside world. I will conclude each section, as I did in the previous chapter, with questions and speculations on possible findings.

Active Participation: The Role of Fun, Excitement, and Flexibility in the Classroom

bell hooks' experiences as a teacher and student highlight the need for teaching methods which maximize liberty and transformation in the classroom. Her experience as a student was dominantly characterized by her teachers' routine deposit of information in her, only to be withdrawn at some later date. This took all the joy out of learning for her, and she grew to hate school. Fun and excitement were often underrated in her experience as a student, which explains her determination to generate fun and excitement with her present teaching practices.

Fun and excitement have their place in education—even higher education—but are rarely given the space or credence they deserve. Teachers are not the only deciders of whether or not their class will be exciting. As hooks' experience suggests, teachers can be limited by their students' expectations for them.²² As a student, I know from experience that we tend to walk into classrooms, especially new classrooms, with a set of expectations and prejudices. As much as we murmur for lack of freedom, we are disturbed and overwhelmed by lack of structure. This is

what hooks discovered with students whom she encouraged to take more responsibility in creating the classroom experience they wanted.

In higher education, most students do not enter the classroom expecting fun and excitement. Even if they did, they wouldn't admit it to their fellow classmates because it's not normal to be excited about school. Of course, this is determined by the circumstances in which students find themselves. If education is a rare and precious opportunity, as it was for the former POWs whom I interviewed, then students are more likely to be appreciative of and excited by their education experience.

"Excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices."²³ Initially, this idea filled me with apprehension. I have had one or two classes which I've resisted or dismissed as somehow inauthentic, because they lack the structure that I've grown to *need* as a student. I've also had a few classes which I've resisted because of their rigidity and inflexibility toward my needs as a student.

This tension between freedom and structure in the classroom reveals that there's a balancing act between the two. While lesson plans should leave room for contingencies, spontaneity, and individual needs, this doesn't call for an absolute lack of structure. Anarchy should not rule as soon as the teacher leaves the room, so to speak. Rather, responsible students should take up their freedom and use it to positively influence the classroom's culture. Freire proposes allowing students like this to develop their own program—an “*organized, systematized, and developed* ‘re-presentation’ ... of the things about which they want to know more.”²⁴ Thus, it

is possible to entertain both structure *and* freedom in the classroom, particularly those in which students take up their duty to actively participate.

This thesis tests the degree to which students in the POW school took charge of their learning experience, by asking whether or not they actively participated in it. I was also curious to find out the role that fun and excitement played in the POW school, if any; but honestly, I didn't expect to see the frivolous kind of "fun" in these classrooms. I wasn't surprised to find child-like eagerness and curiosity in students of all ages, but I didn't think there was anything light-hearted or frivolous about this because I knew it was serious as much as it was a happy response to their education under those circumstances.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential strategy which teachers and students can use to voice their perspectives and share their experiences. Spoken word is the basic building block of dialogue; but even more basic than that are reflection and action.²⁵ True words depend on the collaboration of reflection *and* action. Without action, words become idle chatter; and without reflection, words produce rash action. Thus, it is important to value both components equally.

In the perfect marriage of reflection and action, dialogue achieves the goal of transformation. This points out what dialogue is *not*. It is *not* depositing of information from one person to another. It *is* sharing students' and teachers' perspectives, and discussing issues which hold relevance and practical implications for both parties. Dialogue is not the quest for truth but rather "the imposition of their own truth."²⁶ Nor is it the simple consumption of ideas. Rather, it is the dynamic interchange of ideas which affects people and the way they *do* things—"Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world."²⁷

According to Freire, dialogue is "not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone."²⁸ It can only occur between two parties that are willing to uphold and preserve this right, and doesn't work if one or both of the parties try to dominate and usurp the right. In this way, dialogue requires student and teacher to be humble enough to listen to each other and assume the humanity of each other. Dialogue also requires love and commitment to the causes of liberation and transformation. In fact, "dialogue cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people."²⁹

Without hope and faith in humanity, dialogue cannot be truly practiced. Freire does not promote hope and faith to the point of naiveté, but balances these qualities with critical thinking. Dialogue is not forsaken at the first breach of trust, but rather perseveres until it would be wiser not to. Hope and faith allow people to initiate dialogue while trust, as a natural byproduct of dialogue, sustains hope and faith and allows dialogue to thrive.

Although a prerequisite, critical thinking is also a byproduct of dialogue. Critical thinking is not the accommodation of norms; nor is it the mindless acceptance of established ideas. "For the naïve thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized 'today.' For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality."³⁰ This describes the dynamic nature of dialogue, which affects people and the way they do things which, in turn, transforms the world.

The goal of dialogue is not persuasive, or even informational. Instead of informing others of the dominant worldview, and trying to win them over, "the revolutionary's role is to liberate, and be liberated, with the people."³¹ However, this act of liberation does not pretend to be messianic. In order to be liberated, revolutionaries must first come to the critical awareness that

they are not free. Thus, they do not approach the people as their messiah come to save them, but rather as collaborators in the struggle for freedom.

Furthermore, the revolutionary must “come to know through dialogue with [the people] both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation.”³² In other words, this is an opportunity for the teacher to learn about their students’ reality and how their students perceive that reality. Students become educators as they impart their knowledge and experience of their reality, and educators become students as they learn about their students’ reality. The teacher-student then develops a “re-presentation to individuals of the things about which they want to know more.”³³ This learning cycle has the potential to free both parties from ignorance and other real binds.

Once the teacher learns about their students’ reality and their perception of it, it is the teacher’s job to re-present it to their students in a critical light. Freire proposes this radical way of teaching when he claims, “we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.”³⁴ In other words, teachers must address the root of the issues their students face, and encourage them to positively respond with action.

In order to dialogue properly, educators need to understand and adapt the language of their students, rather than force their students to adapt to their own language, as is often the case. When they are forced to act and speak like those who influence the dominant culture, the oppressed become alienated from their own culture. At the same time, they cannot fit into their own culture because they have become mixed breeds—they “house” dual natures in themselves.

To avoid being alien and alienating people, educators must therefore “understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed.”³⁵

Knowing that dialogue is a radical and non-traditional means of communication in the classroom, I wasn't sure if I would find it in classrooms where teachers and students most likely came from a traditional system of education. I expected to find some of these traditional methods in the POW school because I assumed that this was the only way that many knew. I was also curious to see if Freire's dialogue could be applied to classrooms where traditional methods like lecture were practiced. I wondered whether dialogue was a law which dictated every single act of learning and teaching, or whether it was a more liberating way of seeing and doing things in the classroom.

Language

According to bell hooks, language is “a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies—different ways of thinking and knowing that (are) crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview.”³⁶ In other words, language is a tool of resistance that reflects the ways in which we *think* and *know* about things. However, it is often the case that we use language to conform to rather than resist the dominant culture.

According to hooks, our complicity is political in nature, as is the repression of languages that do not conform to the dominant culture. She critiques the exclusive use of Standard English in the average American classroom. She questions why we never hear languages other than Standard English in the average American classroom. What about black vernacular and Spanish? What about other languages that do not fit into the dominant white culture? Hooks argues that the reasoning behind the exclusion of these languages is more about “capitalist frenzy and

consumption... (and) cultural imperialism,” the need to conquer and know all, than it is about being inclusive to a wider audience.³⁷ The exclusive use of Standard English assumes an exclusive audience—one which fits into the dominant culture despite different ways of thinking and knowing.

Standard English is the norm, and it is abnormal to replace it with other languages, vernaculars, and patterns of speech. So it is radical for hooks to question the use of Standard English and encourage the use of other languages in her classrooms. hooks’ own use of black vernacular is a conscious act of resistance:

When I need to say words that do more than simply mirror or address the dominant reality, I speak black vernacular. There, in that location, we make English do what we want it to do. We take the oppressor’s language and turn it against itself. We make our words a counter-hegemonic speech, liberating ourselves in language³⁸

How can something so mundane as language be used to liberate oneself? By sharing the history of black vernacular, hooks shows that language is not mundane at all, and can be subversive and powerful. For example, she speculates that the first African slaves who were transported to the New World against their will couldn’t help but associate English with their masters. As is often the case, people and language are so inseparable that language takes on the perceived characteristics of those who speak it. In a land where they were owned yet owned nothing, African slaves must have associated the English language with domination and oppression.

hooks empathizes with the initial pain that the slaves must have felt as they lost their own languages and adopted English as their own, but she highlights the joy that also came out of

adopting the English language *as their own*—making it do what they wanted it to do. Negro spirituals exemplify this subversive use of English. Spirituals expressed the slaves’ Christian faith in a deeply personal way and also communicated information that their masters weren’t able to decode.³⁹

Slaves in the South sang “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” to communicate instructions and plans for escape to the North through the Underground Railroad. Although sung in English, the lyrics were not understood by all English speakers—especially the slave masters. This is a true example of turning the oppressor’s language against itself by literally duping the oppressors with their own language. “Using English in a way that ruptured standard usage and meaning, so that white folks could often not understand black speech, made English into more than the oppressor’s language.”⁴⁰

hooks speculates what it must have been like for the first African slaves who were brought to the New World against their will; these slaves had limited means to preserve their experience and share it with generations to come. She wonders what it must have been like to witness the death of one’s own language and the birth of an entirely new one. *I* wondered if parallels could be drawn between African American slaves and Ethiopian POWs. Despite obvious differences between the two groups, there were surely similarities in the way they used language as a means of resistance.

One difference in the historical tension between Ethiopia and Somalia, and between African Americans and European Americans, is that my country’s conflict with Somalia cannot be attributed to racism. The following chapter explores some of the causes behind the Ethiopian-Somali War of 1977 and 1978, since that is when our story begins. But instead of attempting to

"get the facts straight" or pin down specific causes for the conflict, I've decided to listen to the stories that people tell about what they *think* caused the war.

War Stories

My search for answers to questions about the Ethiopian-Somali conflict only raised more questions, and made me doubt everything I thought I knew about it. I became conscious of the fact that the history I knew was biased by my cultural and ethnic identity, and that I didn't know the whole story. That's why I decided to survey the different stories that people tell about conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia, and particularly the war of 1977 and 1978.

The personal background story, which I shared in the first chapter, is a piece of family history. Histories are "stories that we use to make sense of who we are and who we think others are."⁴¹ My family history serves this purpose for me, but it cannot help me make sense of Somalia or Ethiopia as nations, which is why it's important to contextualize my family's history in the bigger picture. That's why I wrote the first section, in order to provide context for my family's history.

The section following "The Ethiopian-Somali War (1977-1978)" is meant to provide context for my fourth chapter, "The School." Thus, I conclude this chapter with a section on Haway, the POW camp where my father and his fellow prisoners were held for nearly eleven years. I've written a fairly detailed account of life in Haway because I think it's necessary to document the harsh living conditions and obstacles to the prisoners' education, before discussing the benefits of their education.

The Ethiopian-Somali War (1977-1978)

Communication theorists Martin and Nakayama "prefer to view history as the many stories we tell about the past, rather than one story on a single time continuum."⁴² This is different than those who view history as facts to be learned. Of course, there is an objective reality called History (with a capital H)--and there are actual real-time events to prove it--but the histories we tell about those events *are not* the events themselves. Thus, History is subjective in the way we tell it, even though it is an objective reality.

Our histories, the stories we tell about History, are shaped by our cultural and personal identities. This is what Martin and Nakayama claim by saying that "the history we know and our views of that history are very much influenced by our culture."⁴³ This is certainly true about my thesis, as a lower-case history, and also about other histories that I discovered in my research on the Ethiopian-Somali War (1977-1978).

The Ethiopian-Somali War was fought over the disputed border region of Ogaden. In my formal research and conversations with people, I've heard many conflicting stories about this region. I've heard from some sources that this region is rightfully Somalia's, and from other sources that this region is rightfully Ethiopia's. One account, called *The Ogaden War Documentary*, speaks from the Somali perspective when it claims that the Somalis "liberated" and "recaptured" towns in the Ogaden region. The documentary portrays the Somalis as liberators and rightful owners of the land, which sharply contrasts with accounts that portray the Somalis as war criminals and pirates of the land. In contrast, these stories claim that the Somalis "attacked" or "invaded" towns in the Ogaden region.

The idea of punctuation helps us understand the discrepancies in different stories about this one war. In this context, punctuation means labeling one event as the cause and another event as the effect or reaction.⁴⁴ It is possible for two people to punctuate the same story differently. My nephews, three and five years old, are great examples of this. When they fight, they want me to choose sides. One of them accuses his brother of pushing him, while the other accuses his brother of taking his toy. They want to know whose side I will choose, and they seem to think this depends on the all-important question, "Who started it?" To one brother, the fight started when he was pushed and to the other, the fight started when his toy was taken. It all depends on how they punctuate their story.

The periods and commas we use to punctuate our stories about conflict tend to serve our own purposes. If neither of my nephews started it, then neither feels guilty. "What... makes (this) a problem of punctuation is that the individual concerned conceives of him or herself only as reacting to, but not as provoking," the problem.⁴⁵ Both individuals are only reacting to something the other did, and both feel justified in their reaction. The implications are far-reaching in the case of married couples, street gangs, and nations at war. If both parties feel justified in their reaction, then the conflict is more likely to escalate or be perpetuated.

There are different ways to punctuate the history of conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. To my knowledge, the story began on July 24, 1977, when thousands of Ethiopian civilians, including my father, were taken prisoner by Somali troops. I never tried to look further or search deeper, until I started writing this thesis. I dedicated an entire section to telling the story of the Ethiopian-Somali War, before I realized that I didn't know much about it. So I started afresh by educating myself about the events that led up to my father's imprisonment.

In order to understand why the Ogaden region is so disputed, it's important to know that it was occupied by the British, during the European scramble for Africa, and then by the Ethiopians, who moved in during the late 1940s. *The Ogaden War Documentary* portrays Ethiopia as an oppressive colonial power which controlled the region for a short time, and kept Somali subjects purposely and calculatingly in the dark so that they would not be self-reliant or gain independence. If this was the case, Somalis could justify their first attack on the Ogaden region by saying, "Ethiopia started it." They could claim that Ethiopia was occupying *their* land, and mistreating *their* people.

The documentary mentions in passing that Kebri Dehar was "liberated" on July 24, 1977, and that this was a great victory for Somalia because the town was an Ethiopian stronghold—yet it doesn't mention the fact that more than three thousand-six hundred Ethiopian civilians were captured as prisoners of war that day. Although it was biased, I learned a lot of history from watching *The Ogaden War Documentary*. It served as a reminder that History is subjective in the way we tell it, and that our histories are very much influenced by our cultural and personal identities. It is important to keep this in mind when reading the following section, which was informed and shaped by the perspective of Ethiopians who were captured and taken as prisoners of war the day that Kebri Dehar was liberated.

Haway: The POW Camp and its Inmates

There was no prison in Somalia large enough to contain all the men, women, and children who were taken captive from Kebri Dehar, so they were dispersed throughout the country to different prisons, ten in total, where they spent a relatively short time until they were transferred to their final destination Haway--where they were held for almost eleven years. This section

depicts life in Haway, based on the testimonies of the former prisoners of war whom I interviewed.

Haway was built from the ground up by its prisoners. Space had to be made for the camp to exist, since the area surrounding it was so rural and overrun with vegetation—so the prisoners made this space themselves. With their own labor, they chopped down hulking trees and erected wooden barracks in their place. During my interview with Tilahun, a former prisoner and teacher at the men’s prison school, he admitted, “We built our own prison.”

But Haway was no ordinary prison. There were no highly secured cells, only simple barracks made of wood and straw. Each shelter housed at least one hundred people—who would notice in this crowded space if one person went missing? I wondered aloud during one of my interviews, “What kept you from leaving?” I know I sounded clueless, but I felt comfortable asking Eyasu, who's like a brother to me. His answer: the fence, guarded by male and female soldiers, and the surrounding land—which was as hostile and foreign as their captors.

I am reminded of the film *I am Slave*, which tells the modern-day story of a young Sudanese girl who was sold as a slave to foreigners, after her village (where she was princess) was ravaged by ethnic and religious warfare. There is a scene from the girl's childhood, which shows her slave master “freeing” her by literally pushing her out of the house where she is held against her will. The child looks at surrounding houses, to her left and to her right, but they are just as foreign as the home where she stays. Although she is given the choice to leave, she doesn't because she is overwhelmed by her situation. Helpless and without any good alternatives, she returns to her master. Even if Haway's inhabitants had opportunities to leave, they wouldn't

so long as they had lost their sense of place and belonging. It was difficult, if not impossible, for many to see a way out of their hopeless situation.

Haway was segregated by gender. Husbands and wives were separated, as were fathers and daughters; but mothers and sons were allowed to live together until the boys reached the age of twelve—after which they were usually moved to the men's camp. The fence that Eyasu mentioned cut through the middle of the camp and encompassed the barracks, keeping prisoners from each other and the outside world. Men and women were kept separate in every part of prison life, including labor, and could talk to each other only under the supervision of the guards. The only communication that many men and women had with each other was through secret letter writing. Young boys who could travel between the two divisions carried everything from notebooks and school supplies to love letters between the two divisions.

Terefe was seven years old when he was captured, and frequently travelled between the two sides. The men had relatively more freedom than the women and on rare occasions, they were allowed to organize events like soccer matches and music concerts with instruments they had made themselves. Terefe explains the role that these small freedoms played during their prison stay:

The more we stayed in prison...I don't know if this is the right word... We got 'comfortable' in it. We tried to find ways to make ourselves actually happy... So people tried to create some life, some sense out of it.

There was nothing normal or sensible about life in Haway, which explains the prisoners' search for meaning and some kind of normalcy. But "don't forget this was a prison," Eyasu warns us. This was the first thing he said to me when I started interviewing him about the school,

because living conditions in Haway were not conducive to the pursuit of education, in the first place. Former prisoners remember fighting hunger pains in class, and going to bed hungry after a difficult day's work and meager rations. Hunger was a constant companion, and malnutrition plagued them.

Haway's prisoners harvested and prepared their own food, and drew their own well water. Their staple diet consisted of sorghum and maize, and the few vegetables they could bring back with them from their work in the field. Some mornings, they were given small rations of bread by the prison authorities. Occasionally, a few prisoners were able to eat some fish they caught as part of their labor routine.

Before dawn each day, the prisoners woke up and were counted by prison guards. At night time, they were counted again. After the small rations of bread they would sometimes eat for breakfast, they were escorted by guards to work. Men, women, and children were subjected to forced labor, enduring long, difficult hours and indiscriminate violence. Soldiers not only served as prison guards but also as taskmasters, providing the brute strength which forced workers to do their jobs. Most people worked on farms, harvesting rice, maize, and other vegetables. Some caught fish at a nearby river, while others collected wood in the surrounding jungle. The products of their labor were used for commercial purposes, and profited the Somalis who oversaw them.

Many women were able to stay in the confines of the camp and create handicrafts, which were distributed within Somalia and exported outside the country as well. Although this was just another form of forced labor, it was a "clean job," and the women who worked these jobs were relatively fortunate because they were able to avoid difficult labor and the abuses that their

fellow prisoners experienced in other fields. Other positions of relative privilege were given to children who served people in the nearby town with menial tasks in their homes.

The combination of hard work, little rest, unsanitary conditions, and malnutrition made prisoners more susceptible to disease. Malaria, cholera, and tuberculosis plagued them.

Psychological problems were common. Infant mortality was high among children who were born to women who'd been pregnant before their captivity. Many people did not survive the harsh circumstances of Haway.

My father continued practicing as a doctor in Haway, and was joined by a team of healthcare professionals and helpful civilians who stepped up to treat outbreaks of disease whenever their camp was plagued. Often, they themselves were sick with malaria and cholera at the same time as their fellow prisoners. They shared their meager rations with each other and found creative ways to treat patients in the absence of proper medicine and medical supplies. Belaynesh, one of the few health professionals there, was a nurse. In the absence of a nasogastric (NG) tube and feeding pump, she recalls using IV tubing to feed a woman, who couldn't swallow food, through her nose for three months. It was this kind of creativity and resourcefulness that was born out of the hardship which faced the prisoners.

Kebedech was another member of the medical team, although she wasn't a healthcare professional. At the time of her capture, she was only in high school. Her journey to Haway was different than the average prisoner who found themselves there. She was part of Youth League, a student-led group which opposed the communist government of Ethiopia at that time. She and four other students fled their country because they were blacklisted and sought after during the Ethiopian Red Terror of the 1970s, in which thousands of people were persecuted and at least 30,000 people were executed by the communist government.⁴⁶

The "Derg," or communist government, tried to uproot the underground movement of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which included Kebedech's Youth League. Students in Youth League used their voices, as well as art and writing, to demonstrate their opposition against the regime. During the red terror, students' neighbors and local authorities reported these "anarchists" and had many of them killed—so Kebedech and her small group fled the country in 1979.

On their way out of the country, Kebedech and her friends unknowingly walked into a military camp which the Somalis had established upon advancing within Ethiopian borders. Kebedech and her friends were not allowed to pass, but taken prisoner instead. Before she was transferred to Haway, Kebedech met Dr. Tibebe in Denan, one of the ten prisons where the Ethiopian captives were dispersed. She describes what it was like to meet him for the first time, after hearing so much about him from other inmates:

Meeting him was like meeting a mythical character. He wasn't what I expected. He was young, maybe... in his late twenties. Very fit, physically, and very confident. He could assure you that things would be alright without saying much.

She also describes the many roles my father played in Haway. As a doctor, he cared for patients in the camp and nearby town. He gave medical attention to Ethiopian prisoners, as well as Somali prison authorities and civilians. He also acted as a "bridge" between the Somali and Ethiopian people, as one who was able to represent his people and resolve matters with their captors in a diplomatic fashion.

Tibebe was highly esteemed in the prison camp, and relatively privileged. He had more rights bestowed upon him than his fellow prisoners—but also more responsibilities, my

interviewees are quick to remind me. Apparently, some prisoners complained that he had it easy and didn't understand their struggle. They were probably among the least of those in Haway. I can empathize with them, as I myself struggle to accept the fact that my father had more freedom and privilege than his people, who were in the same prison but lived separate lives.

Tibebu's privileges included better shelter, different food, and even an occasional "thank you" gift from Somali authorities and civilians when he treated them. Although my father didn't abuse the power given him, he didn't deny it either; and I believe that this was simply because he knew he could use it to benefit his people. He used his rations of dairy, meat, and vegetables—uncommon in the prison diet—to treat the sick and the weak among them. Meanwhile, he ate the regular diet of sorghum and maize; I heard him say once that this food satisfied him more than his special rations. It must have been the satisfaction of solidarity with his people because former prisoners describe their food as bland and tiresome.

Among the privileges bestowed upon my father, the most crucial was his ability to speak his mind and be heard by the prison authorities. They trusted and favored him, and he used this to negotiate on his people's behalf. As a doctor, he negotiated for more medication and supplies, as well as better living conditions. He managed to convince the authorities that certain people, particularly the elderly and children, should avoid difficult labor. As a teacher, he negotiated for books and learning materials for students. Eventually, with the full knowledge and approval of the prison authorities, he and his fellow teachers established a school in Haway.

The School

This chapter tells the story of the school which was established in Haway, and covers the story using themes from previous chapters on critical pedagogy goals and methods. I've told the story in chronological order, for the most part, and incorporated different themes along the way. The first section discusses the origins of the school, and the role of resistance and active participation in establishing the school. The next section is about the role of the prison authorities in establishing the school, and the following section is about the role of the prisoners. The fourth section is a fairly detailed account of school spirit and classroom culture in Haway, including relationships, communication styles, and structure in the classroom. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a section on hope and despair, which make several appearances throughout this story.

The Underground Movement: Resistance and Active Participation

The school which I'm examining in this chapter was more than a place. In fact, it was not very impressive as a place. For years, there was no building or physical structure which represented a "school." There was no space dedicated to the sharing of ideas or the discussion of theories. There were no classrooms, textbooks, desks, or writing materials. In the beginning, the only resources were people, and the seeds of creativity, resistance, and courage they carried in them.

Prior to meeting my father, Kebedech was held in a different prison camp, where she met and befriended another female inmate who became her first student. This woman had never

attended school, and couldn't read or count, so Kebedech gave her basic reading and math lessons. They used whatever materials they could find, including charcoal and whatever surface they could use as their canvas. By the time Kebedech was relocated to a different prison, within a matter of months, her friend had learned to read.

There were other people like Kebedech, who were involved in teacher-student relationships long before the school was ever established in Haway. Terefe, for example, happened to be taken captive along with his second grade teacher. In prison, Terefe and his teacher maintained their student-teacher relationship despite their circumstances, despite the fact that they couldn't meet as freely as they had before their captivity. Terefe's teacher had a different occupation now, working in the fields near Haway. The only reminder of his past as a teacher was the arrangement he had with his student Terefe, whom he'd meet after a long day at work. In order for the two to meet, Terefe would sneak under the fence between the women's division where he stayed with his mother and the men's division where his teacher lived.

Sneaking under the fence was a sport that many of the children practiced--at first in secret, and then in broad daylight--even though the authorities would often beat them if they were caught, especially with letters or other suspicious materials. It was their way of resisting the authorities although, Terefe points out, they didn't necessarily think of it like that. They were just kids, and there was always something on the other side of the fence. But at eight years old, Terefe did this in pursuit of his education. These trips, however small, were significant because he had to cross a border whenever he set out to meet his teacher. Crossing the border was risky but this didn't stop Terefe from pursuing his education.

Under the circumstances, education was not *his* by default. It wasn't something to be consumed, and it wasn't something Terefe could take for granted. Rather, it was something he had to actively seek by literally journeying from one part of the camp to another. This is what it means, according to hooks' engaged pedagogy, to be an active participant in one's own education.⁴⁷ It means resisting whatever prevents us from bettering ourselves. These may be external circumstances, but also our own tendencies and desires to be controlled by our circumstances. It's easy to stay on one side of the fence, and it's easy to yearn for the other side, but it's difficult to pursue whatever's on the other side. This required active participation and risk-taking from Terefe, as it does from anyone in pursuit of education and moreover, freedom.

I don't think Terefe would have told me this story, of crossing the fence, if I didn't pry and ask some pointed questions. Initially, I asked whether he or anyone he knew had ever resisted the prison authorities with their words or actions. In response, he told me that resistance in the prison camp was practically nonexistent... except for the time when two prisoners planned and managed to escape from the camp. I thought it was quite a leap from *no* resistance to complete evasion, so I listened carefully as he described the "chaos in the camp" which followed their escape: curfew was strictly enforced, interrogations were conducted, and beatings became more common. Camp life became even more oppressive as they were forced to endure punishment for the transgression of their fellow prisoners.

Soldiers were sent to find and execute the men who'd escaped. When they returned, they brought one dead body with them and displayed it publically in the camp. But the other man had escaped them and couldn't be found. Just recently, Terefe discovered that *that* man eventually managed to return to Ethiopia, where he was hospitalized and met my mother through a strange

sequence of events. His testimony of my father gave my mother assurance, for the first time in five years, that her husband was alive and well.

The two prisoners were examples of resistance, and what happened to those who resisted. It's no wonder Terefe told me this story first, when I asked him about resistance in the camp. But it intrigued me that his own story was an afterthought, as though it did not exemplify what I meant by "resistance." I wondered at the tendency to label the two prisoners' actions as "resistance," while actors like Terefe were dismissed, at least by himself, as kids who didn't know what they were doing.

This tells me that it's worth exploring the meaning of "resistance," in the context of critical and engaged pedagogy. hooks' experience in predominantly white classrooms, where her only job as a black student was to submit to authority and conform to standards that others had set before her, made the classroom "a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility."⁴⁸ This was drastically different from her experience in classrooms where she could express her excitement and willingness to be there, and "through ideas... reinvent" herself.⁴⁹ But the classrooms which punished and confined students didn't offer these opportunities. These predominantly white classrooms of hooks' childhood and young adulthood serve as uncanny metaphors for Haway.

After racial integration was instituted in school, hooks characterizes her time there by the domination and suppression she experienced at the hands of teachers and white peers. In grade school, she and her fellow black students "learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority."⁵⁰ In college and graduate school, "the classroom began to feel more like a

prison" where professors "used the classroom to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the unjust exercise of power."⁵¹ Although it wasn't physical like the fence surrounding Haway, the confinement hooks experienced in school was *real*. Her metaphorical language helps us understand the literal conditions of Haway, just as the living conditions in Haway shed light on classrooms where students are prevented rather than enabled to reach their full potential.

If these classrooms serve as metaphors for Haway in their oppressive nature, then resistance in Haway means, as it does in the classroom, challenging the authority of those who abuse it and exceeding expectations set by others. First, Terefe challenged the authority of his overseers by crossing a line he wasn't meant to cross. By crossing the fence, he resisted the law of the prison, which kept prisoners apart from each other and the rest of the world. Furthermore, he resisted by pursuing education before the idea of school was approved and accepted by prison authorities, who enforced the law of the prison. This was before it became normal and expected for children to attend school in Haway. In the eyes of the authorities, no "school" even existed at this point because it was still underground.

Terefe serves as an example of one who definitely resisted, in his own unassuming way-- but he is not the only one. As the movement gained momentum, he joined a small group of students, one of many that had formed around the camp. There were usually four or five students in these groups, which would meet and learn for however long they could manage until the approach of a prison guard dispersed them. Adults like Terefe's teacher adopted these children as their own because they were afraid of what might happen if they didn't. What might happen to children who grew up in this environment? What might happen when they were released and tried to resume (or begin for the first time) a normal life?

My father also struggled with questions and concerns like this whenever he thought about Haway's children, so he negotiated with the authorities on their behalf. He gathered learning materials for them by openly asking the authorities who favored him. It was not uncommon for them to give him monetary "gifts" or grant him favors for treating them and their families so he would ask for textbooks, notebooks, pens, and medical supplies whenever the opportunity arose. These requests made it clear that there was an underground movement and brought it to the surface, making it more visible.

The Prison Authorities: The Role of the Oppressors

Some authorities had favorable views toward the prisoners' education, especially concerning the children. But there were also those who actively opposed anyone who tried to pursue education or acquire knowledge, like the man who was beaten for reading a book he had in his possession when he was captured. In light of extreme examples like this, Kebedech points out that any support which the authorities showed the prisoners in their pursuit of education was "relative."

The first mention of anyone who fulfilled either role-- in support or opposition of the prisoners' education-- is Colonel Hussein, who supervised both prisoners and prison guards at Haway. The Colonel made decisions which immediately affected the wellbeing of the prisoners and the way that the prison guards exercised their authority over them. Not only did he approve of the prisoners' education, but also arranged for teachers and students to freely meet, and supplied them with learning and writing materials. He also encouraged prison guards to take the opportunity to learn for themselves, which a number of them did.

Following Colonel Hussein, another Colonel--who remains nameless and faceless in testimonies about him--was assigned to Haway. As I hear stories about him, I am reminded of the Exodus account of Pharaoh, who is nameless despite the role he played in the slavery of the Hebrew people. When the prophet Moses tells Pharaoh that the Lord says, "Let my people go," Pharaoh responds by giving these orders to the taskmasters who are in charge of his workforce:

You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw... Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.⁵²

Similarly, the Colonel is said to have scoffed at the idea of the prisoners pursuing their education. He claimed that the prisoners' job was to fulfill their quota on the rice paddies, and made it difficult for them to maintain any arrangements made by the Colonel before him. My father had managed to negotiate with Colonel Hussein for the children's sake, ensuring that they could stay within the confines of the camp and avoid difficult labor, but this Colonel didn't exempt anyone from difficult labor. His lack of support and outright opposition forced the prisoners' "school" underground again. Although it couldn't be seen on the surface anymore, teachers and students continued their pursuit of education while avoiding detection by the authorities.

Following the nameless Colonel was Colonel Ali, who was new to the camp and "didn't know yet" about the actions that his predecessor had taken against the prisoners' education. My father saw the perfect opportunity to win back the support of the authorities when General Ismael, who supervised the Colonel and others in his position around Somalia, came to visit Haway. While the Colonel worked closely with the prisoners and prison staff, the General only

met with officials and a few distinguished prisoners like my father, whenever he visited. On this particular visit, my father met with the General and Colonel to report on the health and general wellbeing of the prisoners. After fulfilling his role as doctor, my father addressed General Ismael on a different matter:

I wanted to thank you, General, on behalf of the prisoners, for your permission and ongoing support of our school. It's going very well!

As far as General Ismael knew, the status of education in Haway had not changed since Colonel Hussein's administration. That's why my father spoke about the school as if it was still operating and flourishing in the open, even though it was actually underground at this point! He did this in front of Colonel Ali so that the Colonel would witness the General's approval and do whatever was necessary to ensure the freedom of education *on the ground*.

My father used diplomacy to generate positive support of the school. He managed to win back the support of the authorities when General Ismael gave his approval:

These people are more knowledgeable than many of us. We don't know what they will become when they're free, so let's not incriminate ourselves. Let's allow them to be educated in their own language, by their own people.

In the order of events, I'm not sure if the General said this on a different occasion or at this particular meeting, but his statement shows that he supported the prisoners' education. I'm not sure whether his motivations were pragmatic or genuine but regardless, the school could not have resurfaced without his support, which he showed by supplying the prisoners with learning and writing materials, and even ordering the construction of school houses in Haway.

Colonel Ali passed the General's orders down the chain of command, and encouraged his staff to use this opportunity to pursue further education for themselves. Rather than interfere or attempt to dominate the prisoners' education program, he encouraged his staff to participate in it, and support the prisoners in *their* endeavor. Not everyone followed his advice or even interpreted it in the same way. On the men's side, a number of officials took up this opportunity to learn from some of the prisoners who were experts and professionals in the fields they wanted to study but, according to Kebedech, there was no one on the women's side who wanted to learn from the prisoners.

The cooperation between the prisoners and prison guards on the men's side exemplifies the solidarity, between the oppressed and their oppressors, required by Freire's pedagogy. This solidarity requires both sides to humble themselves enough to walk and work together. In the process, they discover that

The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.⁵³

This seems counter-intuitive. How can powerful people be powerless to help themselves? And how can the weak be "sufficiently strong?" Power becomes a vice when it blinds people to their mere humanity and the humanity of others. In Haway, we see the oppressed freeing themselves and their oppressors from the mindset that they were somehow less than human. This showed in the new and improved relationship between the two sides after the establishment of the school and the enrollment of Somali students. Former prisoners testify that these students "respected" their teachers, and that there was a general sense of peace, relative to previous years.

At this time, guards would supply students with textbooks and writing materials. After awhile, they even guarded the prisoners' right to learn, because anything which threatened that would also affect them in their pursuit of education.

From the very beginning, the idea of education was *for* the prisoners and *by* the prisoners. Whether or not they had the support of their overseers, they took action by growing roots and establishing an underground network between teachers and students. This network was the real support system of the school, which is why female students continued to grow and thrive even though they didn't have the same support from their overseers as the men did. This wasn't due to neglect on the General's part because, as far as he was concerned, the Ethiopians should teach their own people, in their own language, without the interference of their overseers. But not everyone reflected this sentiment, and the women suffered because of it.

On the women's side, a lack of support stunted the upward growth of their school. This explains the relative lack of overt signs that marked the physical existence of a "school." Apparently, despite the General's and Colonel's approval, there was no school house in the women's camp; they often held classes in an open field or occasionally under some sort of shade. While the men were able to obtain chairs and blackboards for their classrooms, the women didn't have access to supplies like these.

None of the female authorities chose to participate or take classes as their male counterparts did. Not only did they withhold support, but some of the female guards actively opposed the prisoners' education. Belaynesh recalls that they would express their hostility with random beatings, abusive language, and a seeming pleasure in preventing or disrupting any educational activity. They also made it difficult for male teachers to enter the women's camp and

serve their fellow prisoners, and supervised any interactions between the two sides with general suspicion and distaste.

Nevertheless, the women's school remained deeply rooted underground. Kebedech tells me that when they returned to their country and were reintegrated into Ethiopian public schools, there were no significant achievement gaps between male and female students from Haway. This signifies that what they lacked in support from the authorities, the women compensated for with a strong underground network. This network weaved together teachers and students, even men and women, so that the women saw the fruit of their education as the men did, despite the lack of visible, physical signs of growth aboveground.

At first, when I heard about the differences between the men's and women's camp, I thought it was a gender issue. I thought it was a matter of men discriminating against women, but it turns out that it's just another case of people dehumanizing other people. I didn't know what to do with the fact that women could abuse other women like this. It almost seemed like they were taking on the role of their oppressors, the role of powerful men who had kept them "in their place" or denied them anything in the past. According to a 2006 report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),

Somali women are systematically discriminated [against] and subordinated ... [They face] limited inclusion in decision making structures and leadership roles, limited access to reproductive health, higher rates of stigmatization from HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, denial of due process rights, abuse of women's rights in divorce cases, denial of custody of children [and] denial [of] women's rights of property ownership and inheritance under customary law.⁵⁴

In Haway, female guards could exercise and abuse their authority over prisoners, but outside the camp, they themselves were "systematically discriminated (against) and subordinated." Depending on the context, Somali female guards were both oppressed and the oppressors! This makes it impossible for us to dichotomize or discriminate the oppressed from their oppressors. It exemplifies what happens when "the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'"--they miss the opportunity to be liberated together.⁵⁵ We see that in the women's camp, the authorities didn't benefit from the prisoners' education because they opposed it instead of supporting it and participating, as some of the men did, in their prisoners' pursuit of education.

The Prisoners: The Role of the Oppressed

During one of my father's meetings with General Ismael, the General noted with pleasant surprise that they no longer needed an interpreter to communicate, as they did when they first met. Since then, my father had learned the Somali language under the instruction of a Somali teacher who happened to be imprisoned with the rest of them. He used the language to bridge the gap between him and the General, which was characteristic of his role as a "bridge" between the Somalis and Ethiopians at Haway. A number of former prisoners describe him in this way because he was familiar with the customs and languages of both sides, and used this knowledge to mediate between them.

My father instructed his Somali students, who took private lessons, in their own language. One could argue that this was an act of compromise and obligation. After all, this was their territory and he couldn't force them to learn *his* language. But for my father, teaching the Somalis in their own language was primarily an act of love. I'm convinced of this when I recall

what would happen, years later, whenever he crossed paths with a stranger who happened to be Somali, at a crossroads like an airport where strangers cross paths all the time: a smile would split his face and his beard would follow his smile and he would greet them like an old friend. He would speak to them in Somali, fluently, as if he'd never stopped speaking all those years.

My father had to compromise, in an effort to meet his students where they were. This was a necessary part of his role as a "bridge," as one who lent himself to the use and benefit of both sides. This required laying down his self for others, making himself the common ground that people had between them. This looks different than the resistance I explored earlier in this chapter. In crossing the fence, Terefe resisted authority and exceeded people's expectations of him as a child and a prisoner. But in this case, my father was not "fighting the man," and he wasn't breaking any rules. In fact, it might seem that he was compromising *too much*, even "selling out." So which is it: compromise or resistance? Is there any way to reconcile the two?

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that critical pedagogy makes room for both resistance and compromise (or more accurately, sacrifice). Both are necessary and desirable traits in the revolutionary leader. Both are needed in order for critical pedagogy to work. If there weren't people who crossed the fence like Terefe, in pursuit of their education, it would have been impossible to maintain the network of teachers and students which sustained the school. And if there weren't any middle men, like my father, between the Ethiopians and Somalis, there could have been even more harm and less good which resulted from the confines and restraints on the relationship between prison guards and their prisoners.

I believe "sacrifice" is a better way to describe my father's actions, because "compromise" signifies that both parties are willing to sacrifice *something*. But I'm sure this

wasn't always the case in Haway. At the end of the day, Dad was a prisoner and the prison guards didn't have to compromise with him. Furthermore, I don't believe that sacrifice and resistance are mutually exclusive. In showing his love for the Somalis by learning their language and willingly using it to communicate with them, he crossed a line that many people didn't cross as prisoners. Many prisoners knew just enough Somali to follow orders and avoid being punished by prison guards. This was *expected*. No one expected my father to learn the Somali language willingly, even joyfully, and lovingly speak it to his captors. This kind of love and respect for the Somalis was unexpected, and a transgression of boundaries in its own way.

Freire addresses the importance of understanding the other's language, and the responsibility of the educator to understand and communicate with others in their own language:

Often, educators... speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric. The language of the educator...like the language of the people, cannot exist without thought; and neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they refer. In order to communicate effectively, (the) educator... must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed.⁵⁶

Educators have the responsibility to bridge the gap between themselves and their students. In doing so, they may be alienated from their own culture, but they spare their students the alienation that they would otherwise experience in adapting the dominant language and culture of the educated world. For example, let's take the case of children who lose their grasp on their native language when they start attending school. This was my story too: Amharic was my

mother tongue, but I unlearned it when I started going to school, where English dominated. It's ironic that this process of unlearning happens to many of us when we start going to school!

Rather than alienating students from their culture, teachers should accommodate their students' cultures and attempt to bridge the gaps. This doesn't mean that students should be ignorant or kept in the dark concerning the dominant language and culture, but it means that the dominant language and culture shouldn't alienate students from their teacher. Culture and language shouldn't serve as barriers or excuses which keep the two sides from understanding each other. The educator is responsible for crossing these barriers even if it means that their students are unable or unwilling to make the same sacrifice.

It is impossible to make this sacrifice without loving the other, who may be unable or even unwilling to make the same sacrifice. My father served the Somalis because he loved them, as individuals and as a people, but some of the authorities insisted that he served them because he was obliged as a prisoner. While this is true, it is also true that he served them willingly and lovingly. He wanted the Somalis to know this, but didn't know how to show them as long as he was in prison, so he prayed,

Lord, when I leave this place a free person, please let me show them how much I love them. Please give me an opportunity to show them that I'm not treating them just because I'm their prisoner.

When he was released from Somalia and reunited with our family, Dad shared with Mom his prayer and his desire to repay the Somalis with love. The opportunity came when he started working for the UN and was offered a job in Somalia, which was now ravaged by civil war. A few years after his release, he returned and served some of the same people he'd served in prison,

this time with UN aid. He served as a bridge again, this time between warring Somali factions, by using his knowledge of their language and culture to mediate between them.

Many Somali authorities were displaced during the civil war, when Siad Barre's military government was overthrown. General Ismael was among those who fled the country and sought refuge in neighboring Kenya, where my family settled after my father's release. When Dad heard about the General's plight, he searched for him and found him. He brought him over to meet my mother and sisters, and invited him to stay for dinner. Tadele, my father's good friend and fellow captive, was there that day. He recalls his amazement at seeing the General in their midst, under those circumstances.

The kind of love that my father showed Somalis like the General, both during his imprisonment and after his release, was far from passive. It wasn't just an emotion that led him to *feel*, but a choice that led him to *act*. When he and his fellow Ethiopians were captured, my father determined, "I have no enemies. I will not see the Somali people as my enemies." This was an active decision which was tested, no doubt, by the way he and his people were treated over the course of their imprisonment.

My father was also motivated by duty and love when it came to his own people. He reasoned that he and his fellow teachers were only repaying an old favor--the Ethiopian people had paid for their education, during times of peace, and now they were paying for their people's education. He considered teaching a duty, and served his students from a debt of gratitude that he had for his own education. In his mind, any good citizen with the ability to teach would be compelled to educate their people, under those circumstances. As he used to say, it was "yewudeta gedeta," a duty born of love.

Duty and desire motivated my father and his fellow teachers to pay the price for their students' education. Selashi K. acknowledges his teachers' sacrifice when he says, "they gave us themselves." Terefe's teacher is an example of the "courage" and self-sacrifice it took to teach, especially before the men's school was established. Even though they didn't have total freedom to meet then, and even after a long and difficult day working on the field, he would return to the camp and give Terefe the last ounces of strength he had before retiring for the night. He and others like him gave their students more than an education. They spent their energy and freedom to fulfill their duties as educators and revolutionaries.

Teachers were not motivated by money or any reward other than their students' personal freedom and transformation. Their role, as revolutionary educators who were also oppressed, was "to liberate, and be liberated, with the people" (Freire, 1996, p. 76). But let's not forget this was a prison, Eyasu warns us. There were no good options. The prisoners could live their lives in the camp or attempt to escape and either die or be killed or barely survive. The most practical option was the first one, to continue living in the camp, and hope they would live to see the day of their release.

Certainly, the prisoners were liberated the day they were released from the prison camp, but there's got to be more to liberty than that! Freire is clearly not talking about physical bondage when he claims that the oppressors need to be liberated along with the oppressed. While the guards were not physically confined like their prisoners, Freire would argue that they needed to be liberated as well. But it seems offensive, almost obscene, to compare them to the prisoners, whose confinement seems much more *real*. So what would liberty look like in the context of Haway?

Let's take the case of the female guards, who exercised a reign of terror over the women's division. It would seem that they were exercising their freedom by doing as they pleased with the prisoners but in fact, they only revealed the limits of their own prison. Rather than use their freedom for good, they fell into the pattern of domination and oppression they'd experienced their entire lives. The female guards were living, breathing contradictions. This is typical of people who are oppressed and oppress others at the same time:

The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity.⁵⁷

Even though the prison guards could exercise their freedom, they themselves were captive to patterns of oppression and domination which were easier to exercise than the alternative: love and respect for the humanity of others. This shows that there's more to liberty than the lack of physical restraints. It would serve us well to view freedom through a holistic lens, and realize that it has implications in our spirit, soul, and body. We can be physically free but spiritually and intellectually bound. We can be physically bound but spiritually and intellectually free.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."⁵⁸ The truth is, there are certain freedoms that just can't be taken away. The fact that prisoners like my father could love their oppressors without restraint was evidence of their spiritual and intellectual freedom, which couldn't be taken away from them. The fact that students like Terefe pursued their education under those circumstances shows that the circumstances did not dictate the prisoners' exercise of freedom when it came to educating

themselves. Silashi K. argues that nothing could take this freedom away from them, which is why they were able to teach and learn even before the idea of educating themselves became acceptable in the eyes of the authorities. He claims that their minds were free, even though they were physically bound and limited by their circumstances.

School Spirit and Classroom Culture: Relationships, Communication, and Structure

By the time they were released and returned to Ethiopia, two senior classes had graduated from the men's division high school. Due to the longer and more complicated process of establishing the women's school, there weren't as many female graduates. Nevertheless, Kebedech reminds us that those who graduated were assessed in Ethiopia and found as qualified as their male counterparts. Classes offered for grade school students in Haway included English, Amharic, math, chemistry, physics, biology, and geography. For those who graduated in Haway or previously in Ethiopia, and wanted to pursue higher education, medicine and agronomy classes were offered.

Geography was a dangerous subject to teach because it gave the prisoners a wider scope of the world around them and rekindled their sense of place and belonging. It destroyed the myth that they were isolated, in the middle of nowhere, and reminded them that there was a world out there. Samuel Hynes, an author and World War II veteran, accurately conveys the meaning that maps carry for people in this situation, particularly prisoners of war who are planning an escape: "they confirmed the world beyond the walls and made its roads possible routes; you could get there from here."⁵⁹

After the escape of the two prisoners, Seleshi M. and Sabit tell me that teaching geography was restricted. Learning to read maps, in particular, became illegal. But Dad didn't

believe in the restrictions imposed on teaching geography or reading maps, and continued teaching the subject. He would assign people to look out for guards, and if they approached, he would simply change the subject. This act of resistance was different than the compromise he made with the authorities by teaching them in their own language, but it was inspired by the same spirit of love. He risked his position to teach his people about their own position in the world.

I find it interesting that the list of classes offered in Haway doesn't include a Somali language course. I asked my interviewees if they learned any Somali in school--after all, they were prisoners in a *Somali* prison camp--and they told me that they learned what they knew from observation and interaction with the guards, which was often just enough to follow orders and avoid punishment. Italian, Arabic, French, and German were offered as foreign language courses, while Amharic and English were the primary languages of instruction. But Somali was not taught, either as a foreign language or a language of instruction, unless teachers were instructing one of the Somalis who chose to take classes.

Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia, and historically one of the dominant languages in my country, which is home to more than eighty ethnic groups and distinct languages. However, in this context--a Somali prison camp populated by Ethiopian prisoners--the Amharic language came to represent an oppressed people. Kebedech was a member of the "Amharic department" in the women's division, even though they were not allowed to teach or learn Amharic there. As a former high school student who was studying art before her capture, she found her niche in a perfect marriage of art and language. She used the art of writing to teach the language in creative and subversive ways that would evade the detection of prison authorities.

Since the Somalis didn't understand Amharic, they were generally suspicious of it. They were suspicious of any material, including academic texts, written in Amharic, so efforts were made to limit these texts from freely floating around the camp. This meant that the Amharic department lacked adequate material to teach the language--but Kebedech, with her creativity and writing skill, was able to create new material. She wrote poems and short stories on cartons of powdered milk, which she describes being "like a layered, thick brown bag." She hid these in the straw roof of her barrack and after years of "rats stealing them away," she was left with a few works, which were retrieved by the Red Cross and later published when they were released back to Ethiopia.

During my interview with Kebedech, I asked her to read one of her poems for me, if she had her book *Yet New* nearby. I had been taking detailed notes of our conversation until she said, "Please don't write this down." She proceeded to read a poem called "Medhanit," dedicated to the Ethiopian soldiers who were kept in solitary confinement for eleven years. I couldn't have transcribed or translated this poem if I wanted to. Her use of language was so artful and discreet that it was difficult to distinguish between the obvious and the subliminal in her message. The title itself is "Medicine," although it doesn't necessarily *mean* medicine. She's not talking about treatments given for physical ailments, but the healing power of communication and interaction with others, which the characters of her story were denied. This poem, like many of her other poems, was about camp life, and told a clear story using indirect language.

Kebedech and her fellow prisoners had to find secret ways to communicate and document the lives they lived, like African slaves who hid life-preserving messages and keys to survival in the lyrics of their Spirituals. In the New World, slaves were surrounded by a new language. Over time, they adopted the language as their own, making it do what *they* wanted it to do and using it

against their masters, who owned not only them but the English language as well. In the same way, Kebedech used language to do what *she* wanted it to do. Despite obvious differences in the history between African American vernacular and Amharic, hooks' point about language still stands: it is possible and sometimes necessary to use language "to say words that do more than simply mirror or address the dominant reality."⁶⁰

Kebedech and my father were only two examples of teachers who served in the prison school. Once orders were passed down by General Ismael and Colonel Ali, my father approached others who could serve as teachers and administrative staff. Terefe shares his point of view as a student: "the plan was, everybody who knew something would teach." His claim is meant to reveal the spirit of education in Haway. By specifying that "everybody who *knew something* would teach," he points out that the x-factor of teaching was not position, status, age, or gender. Even if it was informally, *everyone* could pass on their knowledge in some way.

The teaching staff, like the medical staff, was made up of volunteers who were willing to serve under difficult circumstances. A few of these were professional teachers, but most were ordinary citizens who knew enough about their subject to teach others about it. Some had pursued higher education after high school, while others hadn't earned a single degree. Tadele was a university student at the time of his capture, in the process of earning his first degree, and Kebedech was a high school senior who hadn't graduated yet. Both taught classes in their separate divisions.

Tadele, Tilahun, and Belaynesh attest that their students were like friends and family to them. The fact that there weren't any significant gaps in the teacher-student relationship signifies that there was no power struggle in the classroom. This explains the communication style

between teachers and students, which Tilahun describes as "give-and-take," free-flowing, healthy, and smooth. Teachers didn't say, "I speak, you listen" because they didn't feel superior or entitled to their position. Seleshi M. confirms his teachers' testimonies that communication in the classroom was free. Outside the classroom, people were not free to speak their minds; but in the classroom, Seleshi says, "everyone speaks their mind" without any restrictions. This exemplifies dialogue, as it should be.

Ira Shor is a renowned educator who engages in a "a dialogue on dialogue" with Freire in their co-authored book *A Pedagogy for Liberation*. Shor offers a definition of dialogue which both he and Freire agree upon, and also contrasts dialogue with its less ideal alternative:

Liberatory dialogue is a democratic communication which disconfirms domination and illuminates while affirming the freedom of the participants to re-make their culture.

Traditional discourse confirms the dominant mass culture and the inherited, official shape of knowledge.⁶¹

In other words, dialogue promotes freedom and resists the domination and oppression of the dominant mass culture. In place of the dominant culture, dialogue promotes a revolutionary culture. In Haway, the school was an oasis, the one place where prisoners could exercise their free will. It was a place with its own culture and distinct spirit. Haway's dominant culture was characterized by fear and oppression. But in the classroom, teachers and students chose to "re-make their culture" by cultivating open and free communication.

Kebedech describes a typical day in class which challenged my preconceived notions of what a "classroom" should look and feel like. In the women's division, students and teachers would often sit in an open field, facing each other in a circle. They sat in an open field because

they didn't have a proper school building, not to escape the confines of a classroom, and not because students begged their teachers to have class outside, like we do sometimes at Regis, when it's a beautiful day outside. They sat in a circle because they didn't have chairs or desks, not because they were trying something new and different. Still, according to Kebedech, this fostered communication which was intimate and "not hierarchical, by any means."

Kebedech experienced my father's teaching in the medical classes he offered for those who'd passed twelfth grade, either in Ethiopia or in Hawaii, and wanted to pursue further education. For example, *Communicable Diseases* was a practical course offered for prisoners who wanted to learn more about contagious diseases like cholera and tuberculosis, which plagued the camp. Kebedech and a few other women took this class but couldn't meet with my father often, since travelling between the two sides was generally restricted and limited even between teachers and students. Fortunately, since she was part of the medical team, Kebedech could meet with my father outside of class. She and Belaynesh "would learn on the spot," as they followed him on his rounds and listened to him explain what he was doing and why, as well as the symptoms and possible causes of his patients' illnesses. These lessons arose spontaneously and naturally, because my father wanted to use every opportunity to teach in their limited time together.

Although many creative teaching methods were born out of the unique circumstances in Hawaii, many more were inherited from the traditional Ethiopian classroom--where teachers commonly lecture and conduct monologue rather than dialogue with their students. These traditional discourses are "inherited, official." In the traditional classroom, they've been well-established and for the most part, unquestioned. But Ira Shor critiques the lecture method because it "sets up the teacher as an authority who transfers fixed knowledge to students."⁶² Like

a banking account, this method requires teachers to deposit knowledge and their students to withdraw it, forcing students to become solely dependent on their teacher's knowledge.

Although my father used creative teaching methods, he is also described by some of his other students and fellow teachers as a "lecturer" who was very detailed and meticulous in his teaching. Does that mean he was only concerned with "the transfer of informational content" to his students?⁶³ I know, based on my personal experience with Dad, that this was not his motive for teaching. Whenever he taught me a lesson, as a child and later as a young woman, he always dealt with the root of the issue, making sure we understood each other from the very beginning. He took time to clarify *why* and *how* he thought the way he did, and encouraged me to clarify my own thinking. If I challenged or questioned him, he reasoned with me. But Dad knew what he *knew* and after a certain point, when we couldn't reason anymore, he would tell me that he was my father and knew what was best for me. As my father, he did not deny that he knew but encouraged me in my own pursuit of knowledge, even if this meant questioning what he knew. This is how Dad taught me some of his most memorable lessons, so it's easy to imagine him adopting this kind of attitude with his students as well. I believe he wanted his students to *really* understand what they were learning, rather than merely consume information from him.

What would Shor say in response to my father's example? Would he continue to judge the teacher by their methods? He seems to anticipate this question when he says that the dialogic teacher shouldn't be judged solely by the methods they use to pass on their knowledge, but also by their "governing behavior" in the classroom.⁶⁴ In other words, the teacher's use of the lecture method doesn't mean that they're a dictator. The way they treat their students and exercise their authority must also be taken into account. The fact that dialogue is multi-dimensional shows that it's not just a strategy or method, but a way of life in the classroom.

If dialogue is a way of life, with its own culture and its own spirit, then it can be characterized by love and humility. In fact, “dialogue cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people.”⁶⁵ I've already given my father's example of love toward the authorities and his fellow prisoners. And I've shared examples of other teachers whose courage and self-sacrifice were inspired by love. These examples made dialogue possible in and out of the classroom. But the story would be incomplete if I didn't acknowledge the students who also made dialogue possible.

Tilahun claims, students "cooperated with us" by teaching each other. These students had informal teaching roles that were less visible, but definitely real. For example, as a high school student, Eyasu occasionally taught other students who couldn't attend school during the day but still wanted to pursue an education. A number of Ethiopian militia men who were illiterate and uneducated wanted to take classes but had to work during school hours, so they took afterschool lessons in math and reading with students like Eyasu. This meant that there were usually gaps in age and experience between the student who was learning and the student who was teaching. In my interviews, I heard examples of elderly men learning from young boys, and older women learning how to read and write from girls as young as their daughters.

This is highly unusual for Ethiopian culture, which traditionally values people with more age and experience. Traditionally, communication between children and their elders is not "give-and-take," but "I speak, you listen." Even though the communist government of Ethiopia at the time started combating illiteracy by employing young people to educate their uneducated elders, the idea of dialogue between children and elders was relatively new. In Hawaii, we see examples of this among students who taught (and happened to be young) and students who learned (and happened to be older/elderly). This dialogue required adults to humble themselves and learn

from children, and required children to summon the will and courage to teach their elders. Both parties had to transgress the boundaries of tradition and enter a non-traditional relationship which fostered dialogue.

Freire explains this phenomenon of sharing and passing on knowledge through dialogue:

Dialogue is the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study. Then, instead of transferring the knowledge statically, as a fixed possession of the teacher, dialogue demands a dynamic approximation towards the object.⁶⁶

While the student is learning and knowing for the first time, the teacher has the capacity to learn and "re-know" as they teach the subject--either by their own revelation or by their students' illumination of something they'd never seen before. Subsequently, the act of sharing knowledge is not a one-sided transfer, but an exchange between two parties. We see this in Hawaii, where the relationship between students and teachers was cooperative and generous, and the free-flowing communication between them enabled dialogue to exist.

Once, when Kebedech and Belaynesh found an egg, they saw and seized a teachable moment for their young students. They gathered their students around like mother hens and "enticed them with questions" about the strange new object in their midst. When they cracked the egg, its contents oozed out. I can almost feel their excitement and hear their baited breath as one of the students guessed: "I know!! It's oil!" Either he was born in the camp or captured at a very young age. He'd never seen an egg before.

We tend to lose this childlike transparency at some point in our education. When our teachers try to entice us with questions, and attempt to spark our curiosity, we are unresponsive,

afraid to appear too eager or too curious. But dialogue cannot exist in the absence of transparency. As long as one or both of us is masking our true feelings, reactions, and ignorance, dialogue cannot exist.

As students, we enable dialogue by *participating* in it. This seems self-evident--but we neglect our active role as students when we choose to be passive consumers of knowledge instead. I've witnessed this in so many classes and at times, I've been guilty. I've participated in *not* participating. In my experience with teachers who practice real dialogue in their classes, it feels unnatural and uncomfortable for me to step into the active role that dialogue requires of me as a student. I'm used to a certain way of life in the classroom, so I instinctively put on my mask when that way is challenged.

Hope and Despair

Although the reality was that they were indefinitely incarcerated in a foreign land, people like my father believed that they wouldn't be there forever. Their situation, as bad as it was, was subject to change. This is the hope that drove my father and his fellow prisoners to struggle against their present reality, not because they couldn't accept reality but because they wouldn't accept the idea that their future was hopelessly fixed. After all,

Reality...is not inexorable or unchangeable. It happens to be this just as it could well be something else. And if we so-called progressive thinkers want it to be something else, we have to struggle... I cannot, therefore, fold my arms fatalistically in the face of misery, thus evading my responsibility...because "there is nothing that can be done."⁶⁷

But let's not forget that this was a prison! What could they actually do to change their situation, to struggle? We've seen that, although they were limited by their difficult

circumstances, they had a few options: they could risk their lives and escape, if they had opportunities to leave the camp or slip under the guards' supervision, or they could educate themselves and others with the hope of one day being able to enjoy the fruition of their education, which was freedom. Both escape and education were acts of resistance which highlighted the prisoners' ability to make choices within their limited context.

But there's one major difference between escape and education, and that's hope. I cannot know the thoughts or motivations of the prisoners who escaped, but I can imagine the frustration and lack of hope they must have felt to take that course of action. They must have thought their situation would never get better, that it was better to risk death than suffer one more day in Haway. In contrast, education was a hopeful response to the situation in Haway. Inherent in their education was the hope of getting out one day. Hope was inherent in the questions and concerns of teachers like my father:

What might happen to the children who grow up here? What might happen when they're released and try to resume (or begin for the first time) a normal life?

Inherent in these questions was the *possibility* of liberation, because Dad knew that "hope of liberation does not mean liberation already. It is necessary to fight for it."⁶⁸ Freedom from the physical constraints of Haway--the fence, the guards, the surrounding land-- was impossible to achieve without escaping. This was the only option when it came to fighting for physical freedom from Haway. But when it came to spiritual and intellectual freedom, people like my Dad could fight and resist the temptation to fall into patterns of domination and oppression. Still, the hope of obtaining these freedoms meant waiting on a release date that seemed to never come.

In the prison camp where weeks turned into months and months turned into years, it was easy to think, “I have no tomorrow that is any different than today, that is any different from yesterday.”⁶⁹ In that case, education would be futile--something that passed time but made little difference. It would be easy to lose hope and be overwhelmed with despair. If the future was hopelessly cast in stone, there would be no hope of influencing or changing their situation. This despair was self-fulfilling; it discouraged people from learning or doing anything to improve their situation.

Sabit was a student in the men's camp who describes the roadblocks that prevented people from educating or improving themselves in any way. Death and disease were especially cruel agents of despair. Whenever death prevailed, claiming their friends and family, many prisoners gave up hope. Education seemed meaningless then. Sabit recalls my father's counsel and encouragement in those times; instead of teaching the subject matter, he would spend entire class periods counseling and encouraging his students, telling them that as long as they lived on earth, they would experience suffering--but a time was coming when they would be free. Some would retort that the only way to leave the camp was feet first, with "four pilots" navigating a makeshift stretcher. But Dad was persistent, and many were encouraged by him.

Seleshi M shared his story of being personally touched by my father's counsel and encouragement. There was a time, during his adolescent years in prison, when he was overcome with hopelessness. It happened when one of his peers, who didn't attend school, managed to convince him that education was pointless in their situation-- the war had long ended but they were still in prison. For all they knew, the world had forgotten about them. When would they ever be released? When would they ever be able to use what they had learned?

Convinced that education was pointless, Seleshi stopped attending classes. For weeks, he avoided the schoolhouse and Dr. Tibebu-- but he didn't know that my father was looking for him. One day, Dad appeared on the long route that Seleshi took to avoid his house. He took Seleshi aside and asked why he'd been avoiding school. Seleshi told him his reasoning and Dad responded by telling him about his dream of going to war and returning unharmed. He had this dream while they were still in Ogaden and took it as God's promise to return them safely to their homes and loved ones. Tibebu also reasoned that their suffering was not meaningless, and that they could improve themselves, if not their situation, in the meantime. Seleshi recalls my father's words:

Son, I know we're here in prison. We're in a dark place... When you go back home, the people you left--your brothers and sisters and friends--will have an education and a bright future. If you don't get an education, you'll be in the dark when you get out. Do you want to stay that way? Go back to school like someone who will get out of prison one day.

My father's challenge to Seleshi was full of the hope that they would one day be released from prison. But more than that, it was full of the hope that his students wouldn't be in the dark when they got out. My father was aware of the ironic possibility that some of the prisoners could live to see the light of day outside Haway, but remain in the dark. The fact that Seleshe returned to school implies that his hope was renewed, and that he didn't want to "stay that way."

Seleshi and his fellow prisoners were released in 1988, when Ethiopia and Somalia exchanged political prisoners, and he finally saw the fulfillment of my father's words. He and his schoolmates were assessed, upon returning to Ethiopia, and passed with test scores that were

above average. Seleshi was admitted to eleventh grade and Terefe, who was in second grade when he was captured, was admitted to twelfth--but he chose to join the eleventh grade in order to "acclimatize with the education system in Ethiopia."

Seleshi tells me that this reintegration process was the most difficult part of coming home. No one counseled him or guided him into resuming a normal life, a life he barely remembered as a young child before his capture. Even though the transition was difficult for him, it probably would have been harder if he hadn't been able to join his classmates when he returned. Today, he lives in Canada and studies business management. He credits this to his prison education, and says he wouldn't have been able to pursue a higher education without it.

After graduating from high school, Terefe earned his undergraduate degree in Ethiopia. He went on to earn his master's degree in Germany, where he attended school on scholarship. Today, he lives in the U.S., where he completed his second masters degree and works with an environmental engineering company. He also credits his success to the basic yet fundamental education he got in prison: "I learned more in Somalia than I did in Ethiopia," he tells me.

Mom tells me that Dad was "richer when he came back... He came back fulfilled." He had few regrets except wishing he'd helped more people. But he'd been limited by the lack of resources and freedom in prison, to do everything he wanted for those in need. This is what attracted him to the U.N., with its huge vision and massive resources. What started as a two-month consultancy position turned into a career of more than twenty years with UNICEF. His time in prison also gave shape to his vision of establishing an organization in Ethiopia for people who need education and job opportunities, in order to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and be able to support themselves and their families. He never had the chance to establish this

organization in his lifetime, but people like myself believe in his vision and have adopted it as our own. We hope to carry on his legacy.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of this thesis, I predicted that "readers will hear the surprise in my voice as I relay these stories, some of which I'm hearing for the first time." Indeed, there were many surprises for me in the process of hearing these stories and writing this thesis. It surprised me that critical pedagogy was practiced in this space where presumably no one knew about it. My father and his fellow teachers never read Paulo Freire, and they definitely didn't model their classes after his teachings. Yet they modeled the love, faith, and humility required to make critical pedagogy work. I was surprised that their pursuit of goals like freedom and transformation, and their use of methods like dialogue, seemed to arise naturally and spontaneously.

Although there is freedom and room for creativity in critical pedagogy, there are also limits, and my study of the prison school stretched and tested those limits for me. Whenever I discovered something about the school that didn't fit critical pedagogy standards perfectly, I struggled with the school and with critical pedagogy, in hopes of reaching a better understanding of both. For example, I initially struggled with the use of traditional teaching methods in my father's classes, especially when one of my interviewees called Dad a "lecturer"--I was sure that this was an insult in Freire's world! But as I struggled with the meaning of dialogue, I came to realize that it wasn't just a teaching strategy, like lecturing. Rather, it was about the way teachers governed their classrooms. It was belittling to talk about dialogue as a strategy, or even a law. It

was more appropriate to talk about the spirit of dialogue, which is characterized by love, faith, and humility.

I found myself trying to compensate in moments like this, when I thought the school was deviating from a perfectly good case study of critical pedagogy. But in the end, my intention is not to present the school as a case study of critical pedagogy. It's okay if the school and its participants don't fit critical pedagogy standards absolutely, because I know that something legitimate and praiseworthy happened in Haway--even if it doesn't comply with certain standards. The prison school stands by itself as a model that's worth emulating, but I wouldn't bottle it up and sell it as a blueprint for every school to be modeled after, because different circumstances may call for different measures.

I also struggled with Freire's faith in humanity because it seemed too constraining. While Freire acknowledges both the capacity for good and evil in human beings, I still think he places too much emphasis on the *human*. To me, this story isn't just about becoming more human, but more about seeing God in others. Yes, my father was a wonderful human being, but I see God's love and grace in him as well.

One question that really drove this project, and which I hoped to address with this thesis, was: "What did liberty look like in the context of Haway?" How far could one *really* pursue liberty in a POW camp like Haway? In the process of trying to address this question, I found that I needed to consider different perspectives of freedom. One perspective values physical freedom (sometimes at the expense of everything else), and the other values intellectual and spiritual freedom. The former inevitably led to escape from the prison camp (or at least, attempts to escape), while the latter led people to educate and better themselves, though they couldn't

improve their circumstances. The latter was a more hopeful solution, because it implied that the prisoners hoped for a tomorrow that was better, or at least different, than their present-day.

The spiritual and intellectual freedom which could be pursued *in* Haway, regardless of the prisoners' physical bondage, couldn't be measured by position or privilege, like physical freedom--but the value of these unseen things was immeasurable. Initially, I struggled with this conclusion because I thought, "Who am I to say this?" I've never been in the prisoners' position. My physical freedom has never been taken away, and I usually take it for granted. I've never had to actively pursue physical freedom or give it up for the sake of these other freedoms.

Nonetheless, I don't need to experience physical bondage to understand the relative value of physical freedom versus intellectual and spiritual freedom. I don't mean to belittle physical freedom, but I'm convinced that intellectual and spiritual freedom are more desirable and intrinsically more valuable. Selashi K's testimony confirms this: the prisoners' minds were free, and nothing could take this freedom away from them. My father's testimony also confirms this. He was content to stay in prison even when he was offered a way out by officials who offered him a job in the Somali capital of Mogadishu. He refused because of "yewudeta gedeta," a duty born of love for his people. His refusal to leave prison points to a truer and better freedom than he would have gained by leaving.

I had other questions, like "Did people resist in Haway? And if so, what did that look like?" Again, I found that there were different attitudes and approaches to resistance. I discovered that in Haway, resistance came in many forms. Sometimes, it was blatant--like the two prisoners who escaped the camp. And other times it was discreet, like Kebedech when she wrote Amharic poems and short stories and hid them in the roof of her barrack. Terefe resisted

whenever he crossed the fence to meet with his teacher; and so did my father, when he showed the Somalis love by learning their language and using it to teach them. This kind of resistance looked different than others because it looked like compromise or "selling out." But this is resistance directed towards one's self, towards one's own tendency to hate rather than love their enemies. This is not "fighting the man," but denying selfish desires and resisting the temptation to let circumstances dictate our perspective.

All the surprises of this thesis process can be summed up in my discovery that lessons learned in the POW school are applicable to classrooms everywhere. I started this project with the hopeful expectation that this would be true, and that I wasn't studying some isolated case to which the average student or teacher couldn't relate. But in the back of my mind, I was also worried that the "average" student or teacher wouldn't be able to relate to the stories in these pages.

To my pleasant surprise, I couldn't help but connect with these stories as I wrote them, seeing points of intersection with my own life as a student. In bell hooks' discussion of active participation in the classroom, I saw myself succeeding in some ways and failing in others-- like when I participated in *not* participating. When I saw students like Terefe, who actively pursued their education, this realization challenged me and made me more conscious of how I conduct myself in the classroom. I hope that readers walk away with this same challenge and consciousness, not only of their conduct in the classroom, but how they conduct themselves in the world.

As I reflect inward, I am challenged by critical pedagogy and my father's example to conduct myself in a way that's conscious of problems and hopeful solutions. This is what

motivated me to adopt my father's vision, which was shaped by his experience in prison, and his wish that he had helped even more people there. This vision was not only expressed in his U.N. career after being released from prison, but in his desire to establish our own organization, as a family, that would help people. This organization would provide education and job opportunities as a hopeful response to individual needs and societal problems. I look forward to the road ahead of me with the hope of fulfilling this vision with my family.

Endnotes from Chapter One

- ¹ Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 6-7.
- ² Griffin, "Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance," 143.
- ³ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*.
- ⁴ Robinson, "Why Good Hair May be Bad for Black Females," 365.
- ⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*.
- ⁶ Robinson, "Why 'Good Hair' May be Bad for Black Females," 365.

Endnotes from Chapter Two

- ⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 25.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 42.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 44.
- ¹³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 119.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ¹⁵ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14.
- ¹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*.
- ¹⁷ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 2.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 46
- ²⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 31.
- ²¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30.

Endnotes from Chapter 3

- ²² hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.
- ²³ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 7.
- ²⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 74.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 76.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 74.

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- ³⁴ Ibid., 76.
³⁵ Ibid., 77.
³⁶ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 171.
³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ Ibid., 175.
³⁹ Jones, "The Gospel Truth about the Negro Spiritual," 2.
⁴⁰ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 170.

Endnotes from Chapter 4

- ⁴¹ Martin & Nakayama, *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*, 134.
⁴² Ibid., 128.
⁴³ Ibid., 121.
⁴⁴ Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 180.
⁴⁶ Wikipedia, "Red Terror (Ethiopia)".

Endnotes from Chapter 5

- ⁴⁷ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.
⁵⁰ Ibid.
⁵¹ Ibid., 4-5.
⁵² Bible, Exodus 5:7, 9.
⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 26.
⁵⁴ United Nations, "Somalia: Protection Fact Sheet – May 2006".
⁵⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 27.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 77.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 27.
⁵⁸ Bible, John 8:31-32.
⁵⁹ Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 239.
⁶⁰ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 175.
⁶¹ Freire & Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, 99.
⁶² Ibid., 101.
⁶³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 46.
⁶⁴ Freire & Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, 101.
⁶⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 70.
⁶⁶ Freire & Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, 100.
⁶⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 72.
⁶⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 44.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 42.

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