

Will the Caged Bird Sing during a Pandemic?: Reflections on a Culturally Responsive Program to Empower Girls in Malawi

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Abstract

Girls in Malawi continue to exist within a patriarchal system that perpetuates oppression of women. As the pandemic viciously swept across the globe the girls in Malawi faced harsh realities such as: lack of access to education, polygamy, rape and incest. How has the pandemic impacted Malawian girls' lives? Now more than ever girls need to be empowered. Determined to Development (D2D) a nongovernmental organization in rural Malawi is intent on supporting educational equity for girls. Without access to education during the pandemic girls' voices are further silenced. This reflective research article reveals the palpable sense of loss experienced by the researcher, an Afro-Caribbean woman, in the quest to advance the empowerment of girls in Malawi.

Key Words: culturally responsive pedagogy, girls' empowerment, social justice education, equity, systemic oppression, abolitionist teaching

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Introduction

“Strong girls, strong world” was the poster message a group of Malawian girls huddled around and voiced to the world on International Day of the Girl Child in 2017 (Determined to Develop Annual Report, 2017). Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, is 174th out of 187 countries on the human development index. Two thirds of the population in Malawi are under the age of 25 and 40% of female teenagers have already begun childbearing (D2D, 2016) or are sexually active by 12. These realities impact access to education. As in many developing and low-income countries where resources are scarce, girls are at a greater educational disadvantage (Sankhulani, 2007).

Determined to Development(D2D), a nongovernmental organization in rural Malawi is intent on giving access to educational equity for girls. Through partnership and collaboration with D2D, the researcher used her academic and activist voice, passion, and privilege to challenge and disrupt the unjust social systems oppressing girls in Malawi. Using the theoretical frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist teaching, the researcher recruited college students and colleagues with a passion for social justice education. Through this collaboration we built on the existing non-formal curriculum. We facilitated this work over 3 years in annual reciprocal service-learning (RSL) summer practicums to empower girls in Malawi and the women who facilitate the program. The pandemic may have temporarily halted this work but the desire to serve is even more urgent.

In this article, the researcher first discusses her interest as an Afro-Caribbean scholar in the research and empowerment of Malawian girls. Secondly, the article explores the challenges faced by Malawian girls especially in rural Malawi, the site of the work. Thirdly, an explanation is provided of the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist teaching as frameworks

which guided the work with university students and professors in building and facilitating the program. Finally, reflections are provided on the pandemic and its impact by sharing the following;

1. The partnership created working with females in the D2D girl's empowerment group,
2. Efforts to honor culture and understand customs and support the dismantling of patriarchal dominance and,
3. Highlighting voices of students and women involved in the program and identifying challenges as we consider next steps for continuing work in a manner that is feasible and sustainable.

Back to Africa Researcher Positionality

“There’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all” (Hall, 1990, p. 18). I identify as an Afro-Caribbean culturally responsive scholar practitioner with an identity and cultural background steeped in Caribbean history and the Pan Africanism perspective of fellow countryman Marcus Garvey. Grounded in the tenets of Black consciousness and African intellectual traditions, as a researcher I am committed to sustaining the legacy that Garvey espoused: the inspiration and empowerment of Black people throughout the diaspora. “Maintaining a cultural and racial bond with Africans on the continents and throughout the diaspora” (Blain, 2018, p. 13) is key to disrupting white supremacy and eliminating vestiges of colonization from our own modern societies. The frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist teaching for this article are grounded in critical theory research, critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions (Glesne, 2011). Through reflections, the researcher used a standpoint epistemology where one critiqued and reconstructed the narratives

of girls in the patriarchal system in Malawi exposing their voiceless lives, fraught with black male dominance and oppression within society. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained, “A theme of ‘naming one’s own reality’ or ‘voice’ is entrenched in the work of critical race theorists” (p. 57). As a researcher in this space I relied on my activist and academic voice to draw on my cultural funds of Bob Marley’s revolutionist tunes such as “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery”, “Get up Stand up.” These songs and lyrics are an inherent part of my DNA reverberating in my entire being as I witnessed firsthand Black girls' reality of being on the margins. As Cornel West (1993) explained it is difficult to work for emancipation on behalf of others (and to work to solve problems with and on behalf of others) until people (or in this case researchers) are emancipated themselves. As an Afro-Caribbean scholar activist, the researcher wanted to use a legacy of freedom, womanhood, and advocacy to influence and support the Girls’ Empowerment Program.

The Caged Bird

Malawi ranks in the bottom quintile of countries on the Gender Inequality Index, which is a composite measure of reproductive health, female empowerment and economic status. Gender inequality contributes to low decision-making power among girls (Nash et. al, 2019). There is little or no power nor freedom in the hands of girls in Malawi. While many NGOs have offered support to girls’ initiatives in Malawi, girls in rural areas are still far behind in the movement to empower women. Girls are a disadvantaged group in rural Malawi because they are considered a source of domestic labor (Sankhulani, 2007). Although traditional cultural practices and sexual rituals occupy a significant space and place within ethnic groups in Africa, they also play a big role in disempowering girls and women (Warria, 2018). As the researcher embedded herself in this rural space in Chilumba, the evidence of girls’ oppression, silence and struggles became

foremost in her mental construct as she navigated the cultural landscape of gender relations in Malawi. The researcher grappled with the brutal facts, 47% of girls are married by the age 18, women in the area have an average of 6 children in their lifetime, and approximately 30% of women in Malawi are illiterate (D2D, Annual Report, 2017). Girls' voices are silenced. Girls are initiated into a domesticated lifestyle which empowers men and sub-ordinates women. The traditions and patriarchal social systems encourage child marriages, forced marriages, sexual initiations, respect for elders/men, being domesticated and pleasing men and boys, including sexually (Malawi Human Rights Commission [MHRC], 2006). Illiteracy reigns and male dominance entrap girls' access to resources and opportunities to freedom. In this space, in rural Africa, Malcolm X's 1962 words rang true "The most disrespected person in *Africa* is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in *Africa* is the Black woman. The most neglected person in *Africa* is the Black woman." Too many girls in Malawi are sidelined, ignored and discounted. The Malawian culture creates and maintains individual and collective identities. Through gender socialization, young girl initiates are victimized "in the shadows" and there is a conspiracy of silence between the initiates and the initiators to safeguard the initiation tradition (Warria, 2018). This cultural code of silence which inhibits girls' autonomy and perpetuates male superiority must be broken. Girls'empowerment is the antidote to this human rights crisis. Education can serve as the vehicle to disrupt the cultural bondage of girls' oppression and colonization in Malawi.

Set Me Free Girls' Empowerment Program

Determined to Develop (D2D), a nongovernmental organization, has promoted girls' empowerment in Malawi through initiatives which invest in their education (D2D, Annual Report, 2017). Programming developed by D2D has had a significant impact for the girls of rural

Malawi. The resources, training and mentoring have aided in preparing girls to pursue higher levels of education previously unattainable (D2D Report, 2017). The program utilizes the UNESCO goals which supports gender equality through the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that promote the equal value of women and men, engender respect and enable young people to critically question gender roles and expectations that are harmful and/or encourage gender-based discrimination and stereotyping (UNESCO, 2015, p.15). In the D2D 2017 report, they shared their impact facilitating Girls' Club meetings with over 70 girls, providing them with tools through their non-formal curriculum specifically targeting the needs of the girls. These lessons focused on topics such as: self-esteem, leadership, goal setting, health, hygiene and safety. All these lessons are constructed to promote global citizenship domains of cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral development of girls in rural Malawi.

In collaboration with D2D, the researcher sought to create new spaces and opportunities for these girls in Malawi, to openly confront discrimination and systemic oppression and to assert their voices and social agency, liberating women in this society (Blain, 2018, p. 200). Many Black girls on the margins are still struggling to make their way to the center. While women across the globe have seen liberation in many forms: social, political, educational, girls in Malawi are still entrapped in a black patriarchal society which excludes them.

Frameworks

This work is constructed within the frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist teaching both informed by critical race theory to challenge the conditions of inequality, systemic oppression and exploitation of girls especially within a pandemic. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated the purpose of culturally responsive teaching is to provide opportunity and support for students to learn meaningful academic knowledge, skills and dispositions; affirm their identity and heritage; and become more critically aware and prepared to challenge

inequalities. Abolitionist teaching is the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, remembering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools (Love, p. 2). In this case the Girls' Empowerment Program served as a vehicle to disrupt the inequities in Malawi gender structure. This was accomplished by bringing girls to the center using abolitionist and culturally responsive education to unearth the phenomenal black woman power, strength, and fortitude. Thus, to push back against a colonial culture perpetuated by Black men/patriarchs.

Get Up Stand Up: A Culturally Responsive Summer Program

Overtime, Black women leadership have advocated and emphasized racial pride, African heritage, economic self-sufficiency and African redemption from European colonization (Blain, 2018, p. 11). This remains an inherent part of Black women empowerment who have fought for and deserve a seat at the table. In 1914 these views were espoused by Black women who would not accept being silent or marginalized but sought to be at the center in a time and age when black men were still entrapped with oppressors' beliefs and ideologies a tainted legacy of the colonizers. This remained evident in 2017, the first visit and journey to Malawi, a throwback to that era. The men were intellectually engaged and committed to the improvement of the education system for boys. In contrast, intentionally and explicitly excluded and unexamined, were the voices of Black women. Needless to say, the presence and input of the Black female academic was absent. Black women, in their eyes, were still on the margins. Eunice Lewis's call for 'revolutionizing the old type of male leadership' in 1924 is equally fitting in 2020. Black patriarchy in Malawi needs to be challenged and disrupted to give girls a voice. The initial exploration with the girls, though brief, was an instant connection in sisterhood, as not only did

the researcher look like them, being a Black woman, our cultures were so enmeshed, a symbol of their future, an educated Black woman. As Nash et. al. (2019) shared, “Importantly, outside experts and role models were suggested by girls not only for their perceived credibility, but also for their ability to help girls develop aspirations for the future.” In the D2D Report 2016, Maria stated “As much as I thought women can be highly educated, I never knew that female professors do exist somewhere else and this has given me a reason to work extra hard because I would want to be a professor one day.” Our cultural exchanges were rooted in our rich cultural legacy of music, drama, survival, and redemption. McIntosh & Bowman (2019) looking through a culturally responsive lens, first were able to highlight and use the Malawian assets to reframe their initial resistance and engage in meaningful dialogue around womanhood and girls’ empowerment. This initial contact and exchange were pivotal in the activist work to advocate for the basic human rights for girls in rural Malawi.

In 2019 on a second trip to Malawi, although the goal was ongoing support of the boys’ school, it was imperative to build upon the initial experience with the girls. With deliberate intentionality, the researcher considered a reciprocal service-learning (RSL) model for the program offering for the girls with intercultural competence at the center of our interactions. This disrupted the normative practice of service learning where participants enter communities as saviors attempting to impose ideas on others. Collopy et. al (2020) found reciprocal influence between participants is at the heart of the RSL approach. It intentionally seeks deliberate empowerment and the valuing of community members’ knowledge; ample time for developing trusting relationships and reflection; and acceptance of the inevitable discomfort that accompanies transformative dialogue. RSL experiences begin with common or complementary goals that require intergroup contact, cooperation, and mutual interdependence. Each group

perceives that they need the other to be successful. With this in mind, the researcher recruited a colleague in the professoriate, an art educator passionate about using art to challenge the siloed spaces in academia and giving voice to girls and sharing this experience with the girls in Malawi. The second trip to Malawi was empowering. No longer was the researcher grappling with the aftershocks of the confines of a colonized space but was intent on creating a safe space for girls' empowerment. Women from D2D and university students in the summer practicum from a midwestern college in the United States and a university in Malawi, all joined in concert and worked in solidarity to celebrate the girls in the weekly Girls' Club meeting. As Nash et. al. 2019 posited - role models must come as a way of convincing the girls... the girls admire the one telling them, therefore they listen and act accordingly. In this space we honored the girls' culture by drawing on their heritage to engage, affirm, and support them. As Milner (2007) posited researchers must interpret and represent people and communities of color in ways that honor those communities and in ways that maintain their integrity. We used abolitionist teaching to reclaim, reinvent and reaffirm their womanhood and beauty through poetic works of Maya Angelou at times, subverting the brutal past. We laughed together as we modeled our blackness, our pain, bonded as phenomenal women modeling chitenje, the Malawian dress. We were one, women empowered in harmony. The researcher left Malawi emboldened to fight for freedom of the girls entrapped in this cycle of patriarchy.

Summer 2020 was significant. The possibilities were endless if the work continued. The girls were eager to learn, to thrive as human beings in a space that too often confined and robbed them of opportunities. The words of Bettina Love's, the abolitionist teaching scholar, gave voice to the aspirations of the girls, "there is one thing I know with everything I am: we who are dark want to matter and live, not just to survive but to thrive." (Love, 2019, p.1) Building on this work

became a priority for the researcher. So, with a sense of urgency, the researcher in collaboration with peers from the Human Rights Center at the university, interviewed and selected students from our teacher education program to participate in this reciprocal service-learning practicum. Two female students were selected, one black and one white. They were actively involved in learning and using abolitionist teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy in our Urban Teacher Academy. They volunteered to travel to Malawi in Summer, 2020. The students spent spring semester working with the researcher using the aforementioned frameworks and the UNESCO goals to add to the already in place non-formal curriculum in Malawi (D2D, 2017). We created a series of lessons entitled, "Get Up, Stand Up: Using Culturally Responsive Strategies to Empower Girls in Malawi, Africa." We employed the following UNESCO goals: cognitive goal - "Students acquire knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues and the interconnectedness and interdependence of different countries and populations." social emotional goal - "Students experience a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, based on human rights." behavioural goal - "Students develop motivation and willingness to take necessary actions." We aligned these three goals with literature with narratives of six empowering black women, three from Africa and others from America. We planned to use the narratives of the following remarkable Black women to enrich the program: Rose Ziba Chilumba, Wangari Maathai, Zenzi Miriam Makeba, Harriet Tubman, Maya Angelou, and Oprah Winfrey. We shared their career, courage, mentorship, positive impact and the hope they bring to women around the world. The girls will be able to relate to these women's lives of pain and suffering and ultimately gain the freedom to sing, and to be strong. Irvine (2002) explained that the curriculum is transformed with culturally responsive teaching because the subject matter is viewed from multiple perspectives, including the

viewpoint of the oppressed and disenfranchised groups. The learning outcomes support girls understanding the power dynamics in their communities, affirm their identities as phenomenal Black women, and encourage them to engage in the struggle for equity and take action in disrupting the black patriarchal structures in their communities. The curriculum was set. The social justice students were ready to serve. The COVID pandemic hit. The world closed its borders. The program halted. Now we live in spaces with pandemic restrictions. The researcher pondered whether these restrictions further constrict the lives of these girls in Malawi.

Lift Our Voices

We must tell our stories and reclaim our superpowers in the midst of social and cultural marginalization. (Smith, D., Caruthers, L., & Fowler, S. 2019, p. 70). D2D's Girls Empowerment Program has positively changed the lives of many girls in rural Malawi thus far as documented in D2D Reports 2016 & 2017 respectively. Maria Mtawali shared, "I feel so thankful to be part of girls club to associate with other girls and share many experiences. I have personally benefitted a lot from girls club which has helped me develop self-confidence and offers me the opportunity to express myself in day to day life". Milliam Mnthali, one of the Girls' Club members, shared her story "We learn a lot of important stuff at Girls' Club which isn't taught to us at primary school, like lessons on how to take proper care of our bodies as girls and the benefit of not having a relationship and deciding against early marriage." No weekly Girls' Club meetings occurred for the girls, no space to be empowered, no girls' group leader on site. In the face of black patriarchy, it was crucial for women to use their academic and activist voices to challenge and disrupt these inequities in rural communities so more girls like Maria and Milliam could reclaim their own superpower of being a powerful Black woman. Social justice activism was key to making an impact, hence using collectivist voices of women to empower the

girls in Malawi was essential. Social justice demands the reorganization of unjust social, political, and economic institutions by people as members of groups for the service of the common good (Ferree, 1948; Pope Pius XI, 1931). As the researcher reflected on the pandemic and its impact on the girls, she called on the other women who worked with the Girls' Empowerment Program, both in Malawi and the United States, to further critique and reconstruct the narratives of these girls, challenging the conditions of inequality, oppression, and exploitation. Moving from silence to speaking out is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of "talking back" that is no, mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is a liberated voice. (Hooks, 1989, p.9). Malawian girls are resilient and strong. For example, we draw on the narrative of a college student who defied the trap of patriarchy, teenage pregnancy and abandonment. She emerged a model for the girls, a single mother, a small business woman in the last year of her college journey, poised to celebrate her legacy of freedom, self-sufficiency and independence to advocate for girls in her rural community as she did last summer in our program. The pandemic has halted her education now but with a voice of advocacy she laid bare the pain of the girls during the pandemic. She shared "Some have already started getting early pregnancies because they have nothing to make them busy....am sure by the time schools will be opening some girls will not be able to go....and academically students have stopped studying and they have lost hope that will go to school sooner...so this can affect their performance when schools reopen." Malawi participant. (Personal communication, 07.11.2020)

An area of concern in the education of girls in rural Malawi is the lack of female teachers (Sankhulani, 2007). Many social justice educators such as the rare female head teacher who lives in Malawi and has worked with D2D to facilitate the Girls' Empowerment Program lamented:

Malawi itself is not necessarily feeling the firsthand effect of the pandemic.

Comparatively we have few cases. Our clinics and hospitals are not seeing the stretch of the health crisis. Malawi, however, is feeling the effects of the health crisis in other ways. Schools have been closed since the end of March. All schools were ordered closed by the President of Malawi just days before students were to write term 2 examinations. After many rumors circulating as to when schools would eventually open, many District Councils Traditional Authority leaders (chiefs) have called upon the government to open schools for fear of continued idleness of students which has led to a spike in early pregnancies and marriages. I'm connected in a WhatsApp group chat with fellow head teachers within our small area (7 schools). Of the 4 government schools, 16 students have officially dropped out of school due to early marriage or pregnancy (1 male, 15 female). This information was shared because the ministry is asking for submissions from government schools. Zodiak, a news station within Malawi reported today that Nkhata Bay District has seen 221 early pregnancies of students within their district. It's also important to keep in mind that this is only data from girls that are enrolled in school. At the secondary level, that only accounts for 20% of the population of age-appropriate young people. There are ripples of this being felt in many areas that we probably won't see data on for years, but it will be large. The largest population groups in Malawi are under the age of 19 and this pandemic will hit them the hardest, most especially those

that are already in vulnerable situations. A. Morneault, (Personal communication, August 10, 2020)

This narrative further stirred up the researcher's spirit of activism and connected with the pain of the women who are living this experience in Malawi during a pandemic. We had made so much progress, now it seems all this work was upended. From a distance we grappled with our pain. In our conversations, as social justice colleagues in academia, we expressed feelings of loss, suffering, anger and solidarity with the girls in Malawi. One colleague recounted and revisited her experience connecting and healing with the women and girls in Malawi through their cultural expressions. She bemoaned the loss of the rebellious bold spirit of the girls and the safe space for healing and becoming caused by the pandemic.

The effects of the pandemic will be catastrophic for the Girls' Empowerment Group. It interrupted the classes as well as the leadership. Young ladies were not exposed to other positive role models and voices that could assist them in achieving their potential and goals. The most moving example for me was the drama developed for conversation, culture context, and empowerment. When I think of this drama it still brings tears to my eyes. The feelings of hopelessness, despair, and ensnarement were evident in their presentation. Following the drama, we, as a collective group of women, were able to talk about the drama and hear the young ladies' voices and desires. Without the Girls' empowerment group, the young ladies are left alone with no one to talk to about their feelings, solutions, and gain insights on how to develop their voice which is so desperately needed. C. Bowman (personal communication, September 30, 2020)

Another colleague who recently visited and observed the Malawian marginalization of girls, worried about the future for the Malawian girls who were learning through the program

their value in contributing to the economy. She described a dim future for girls' empowerment and their visionary thinking.

I believe this pandemic will have a negative impact on this entire generation of women and girls and consequently the economic (and social) of Malawi as a whole. The girls miss out on a chance to learn and develop in "safe" environments that are difficult to compensate for in the best of situations. Educating women has a greater economic impact than educating a male, therefore, the entire nation will be negatively impacted due to the young women's lost year (hopefully at most a year). C. Lawless (personal communication, August 18, 2020)

We have experienced a heartbreaking sense of loss not being able to connect with the girls through their culture and the performing and visual arts. This sentiment is expressed in excruciating details by another colleague who collaborated with the researcher and facilitated the last powerful Girls' Club Meeting before the pandemic.

Since being in Chilumba and working with the girls at Determined to Develop I have often thought about the challenges that women and girls in Malawi experience. In those reflective moments, I always pause and take a deep breath. Yet with the impact of covid-19 on their communities and schools, I realize that as I think about these young women, I have been holding my breath. Holding my breath in awareness that education is the only way to transform communities and without access to education, communities - and those within them, are stifled. Holding my breath in the hopes that girls are finding healthy and supportive avenues to continue their education in non-formal and socially distanced ways. Holding my breath as I anticipate dramatic increases in sexual assaults and unwanted pregnancies for these young women. And holding my breath in anger at the

recognition that most people, myself included, are so focused on our day to day challenges amidst the pandemic that we have forgotten our sisters in Malawi. It is incumbent upon us to step outside our immediate present and consider the long-term implications of this public health crisis as the ripple effect of covid-19 extends out into every aspect of life. D. Bradshaw (personal communication, August 28, 2020)

The Urgency of Now

The pandemic did not extinguish the fire in the researcher's belly but reignited her imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, and boldness to advance this work in giving the girls agency and a voice to disrupt the systemic oppression which certainly has shrouded their lives. We must consider next steps for continuing this work in a manner that is feasible and sustainable. The challenges seem so daunting right now as eager college students are left in limbo wondering when they can travel to Malawi to connect with the girls. As one student noted "The cancellation of the trip to Malawi was heartbreaking. As a black woman from America, I have evaluated the opportunities I have and reflected on the impact of my success as a Black woman could have on the young ladies. I planned to discuss my experience as a first-generation college student and the impact of education. I understood that I would have been a real-life example of a woman who takes advantage of opportunities to help build her career, education and wellbeing." L. Fountain (personal communication, July 13, 2020). What a missed opportunity! The other student expressed hope to continue the work "Hopefully, we can create lessons that will fill in the gaps of the year they were missing while also progressing the program forward." J. Bailes (personal communication, August 14, 2020).

With a liberated voice, the researcher continues to draw upon her inner fortitude, reliance, and endurance (DeGruy, 2017) to tell this story. We are still looking forward to continuing our progress in creating a space to empower the girls since this work is a matter of human rights.

These girls need to claim their humanity. We as women worked with and created the space for the girls, claimed our humanity when we speak out against racism, poverty, sexism and heterosexism...healing from this harm by making one's experiences and point of view public remains one of the most fundamental contributions of "breaking silence" Collins (1998). As a Black woman, whose experiences were often fraught with the same challenges of the Malawian women, the researcher will not sit back and accept this marginalization and colonization of the girls. Throughout this pandemic, the researcher continued to collaborate with D2D through WhatsApp messages to explore opportunities to further this work. With the absence of a weekly Girls' Club meeting, no schools opened, and no contact with the girls, we remain in dialogue, hopeful the pandemic will not cripple the path of freedom for many girls.

How can activists continue the practice of working in solidarity with girls in rural Malawi, intentionally using culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist teaching to empower them? Will this pandemic tamper girls' imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, and boldness? On December 20, the WhatsApp message from the college student read "I want to tell you that I passed my final exams waiting for graduation day, though the date is not set. Malawi participant. (Personal communication). On January 12, 2021, one of our D2D board members shared, they had hired a new Girls' Empowerment Program director. A. Morneault (personal communication). This pandemic may have delayed the work, but the path is set to emancipate and empower these powerful, bold and phenomenal Black girls. The researcher contends the caged bird will sing during a pandemic, after all being caged is not new, tasting freedom is the goal.

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